

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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Adventure

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BAY

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MAIL
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

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by Brett Halliday

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R.C. TUTTLE (*Delayed Verdict*) tells us:

Regarding my family — I have four sons, 33, 31, 22 and 9, and a daughter, 21. The two older sons are married and the oldest has presented us with a grandchild. So, you can figure that I must be around 39 or 40. Actually, I feel about 21.

I started my working life in 1940 as a chemical engineer and spent the war as engineering officer on a destroyer based at Guadalcanal. After the war, I got into chemical instrumental analysis — infrared, etc. and at present I'm a research chemist in Aerospace.

During the late forties and early fifties, I took a shot at fiction writing with a few minor successes. However, I shoved it aside in favor of doing graduate work in chemistry and didn't try it again until about eight years ago. Luckily, I've been doing a lot of technical writing through the years so the effort wasn't painful.

I'm originally from Rye, N.Y. and we have lived in Conn., Ohio, Milwaukee, and finally here in Sunnyvale. Besides my writing efforts, I am a serious student of Photography — do my own processing — and mess around with the piano. After retirement, I plan to write full time and try to make some money with my camera.

WILLIAM SCHOELL (*Don't Dare Reject This Manuscript*) says:

I'm 28, and just at the start of my career. I've sold articles to men's magazines and digests. This is the first mystery story I've sold. I also write for film publications and alternate lifestyle journals. I've finished two novels (thrillers) which are making the rounds, and I'm putting the final touches to a third. This week alone I'm typing up the final draft of a one-act play and beginning the rough draft of a fourth novel — in addition to the usual queries and so on; so I keep plugging away in every area I can think of. I work on everything from greeting card verses to erotica and consider myself lucky to have a wide range of interests; it helps.

DONALD C. WALL (*Animal Sounds*) writes:

I was born and raised in Rochester, N.Y., studied at Syracuse (Forestry, then English) and Florida State, and am now teaching English at Eastern Washington University, including a course in Mystery/Detective Fiction. I've written one mystery novel and have started a sequel; the biggest mystery of all seems to be how to get them published. In my spare time I coach two soccer teams and referee. I've also written a young adult soccer novel — also no publisher yet. Will keep trying, though — if nothing else, maybe the U.S. Postal Service will end up in the black this year.

●

The Stalker of Biscayne Bay

by BRETT HALLIDAY



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EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL HAS ANOTHER SIDE TO IT, a side that is not so attractive. Miami Beach was no different. The glamorous luxury hotels were on the other side of the island resort; this side, backed up to the waters of Biscayne Bay, was several strata lower, in beauty, in status, and in the people who lived there. It was a nice enough area, Mary Ann McCoy supposed as she hurried down the street toward the complex where she lived. Some of the streetlights were out, and the darkened ones left several good-sized patches of deep shadows.

Being out alone late at night didn't both Mary Ann. It was just part of the job. She wasn't even thinking about the shadows as she walked through them. She passed under a streetlight that was working, and it lit up her long blond hair. Her face was calm, with a touch of tiredness showing on it. She was glad she was through for the night. All she was thinking about was getting back to the apartment, having a drink, and then getting some well-deserved sleep. *You spend your whole life in bed*, Mary Ann thought, and her full lips curved in a smile.

She entered the shadows again, her trim legs moving easily under the skirt with the long slit up the side. Her purse swung from her shoulder. There were several hundred dollars in it, but carrying that much money didn't bother Mary Ann, either. Handling money had never fazed her.

Something started to bother her, though, some barely recognizable feeling of unease that made her pick up the pace of her steps. She was only two blocks from her apartment house, but both streetlights were out, leaving a dim yellow lamp in the courtyard of the apartments as the nearest light. Mary Ann kept her eyes trained on it.

Her ears had started straining for sounds behind her, and even though she felt foolish for being suddenly scared, she took her eyes away from the light in the courtyard and glanced back over her shoulder. There was nothing there but darkness, and she told herself she was getting goddamn paranoid.

A car went through an intersection on a cross street several blocks behind her. Something blotted out the passing headlights, just for a second.

Mary Ann caught her breath and stopped. She heard a footstep, another, then silence. Someone was behind her, someone who didn't want her to know she was being followed.

Stopping had been the wrong thing to do, Mary Ann knew instantly. That had just alerted her follower that she suspected she was being followed. She swallowed, her mind trying desperately to figure out the best thing for her to do now.

She suddenly smiled, although she knew it couldn't be seen, and a shrug lifted her shoulder. A gentle, self-mocking laugh came from her lips, and she shook her head. Turning lithely, she started toward the apartments again, praying that the act had fooled whoever it was back there.

Not for a second did she consider the idea that the man might not be following her. Not this late at night. Of course, he might simply have a business proposition for her, but if he did, he shouldn't be so shy about it. She had to go on the assumption that he didn't mean well in following her.

Now, if her jaunty air had just fooled him enough to let her get a few feet closer to the apartments, she could make a run for it . . .

She heard the running footsteps, and her taut nerves snapped. Mary Ann broke into a run, but it was too late. Someone hit her from behind, wrapping his arms around her and bearing her to the ground. They fell in front of a darkened store. Mary Ann's breath was driven from her by the weight coming down on top of her. She twisted wildly, trying to tear away from the enveloping arms.

The man was too strong; one hand pinned her down while the other cracked across her face in a hard slap. Mary Ann gave a sobbing gasp and cried out, "Leave me alone! Let me go!"

A voice hissed back at her. "Never, you slut! You should have thought about what might happen to you when you took up this life."

"I never hurt anyone — "

"Lies! You hurt everyone. And now you'll pay!"

Mary Ann saw his arm raise, saw the glint of a distant light on steel. She started to scream. His other hand came down on her open mouth, clamping it shut.

The scream died with her.

"MICHAEL SHAYNE!" LUCY HAMILTON SAID SHARPLY. "You know the doctor told you to take it easy until those bullet wounds were fully healed."

Shayne grinned as he hung his hat on the rack just inside the office door. "They *are* healed, Angel," he said. "And you don't want me lying around and getting out of shape, do you?"

Shayne looked like he would have a long way to go before he would be out of shape. He was tall and rangy, with the broad shoulders and narrow hips of a natural athlete. A shock of rumpled red hair topped his lean face.

"Still," Lucy Hamilton said from her desk, "I could have managed by myself for a few more days."

"We can't keep turning down cases while I recuperate, Angel. I still have to pay your salary, you know, and good secretaries don't come cheap!"

Lucy started to come back with a retort, then thought better of it, and shook her pretty head. She had learned over the years as Shayne's secretary that the big private detective usually did what he wanted to, despite the concern of his friends when he pushed himself too hard. And there was always the possibility that he was right about his wounds from his last case being healed; Lucy had seen plenty of evidence of Shayne's ability to bounce back.

"Anything interesting this morning?" Shayne asked, seeing that she had accepted the fact of his being there. Inside, her solicitude made him feel good. There was a lot more to their relationship than just employer and employee.

"You do have some visitors," Lucy admitted with a nod at the closed door of the inner office. "I was just going to call you and let you talk to them on the phone when you came in."

"Must be somebody important, or somebody with a real problem."

"Both. Have you heard of Reverend Jeremiah McCoy?"

Shayne wasn't an overly religious man; the Catholic upbringing his mother had given him had never really taken hold. But he knew about Jeremiah McCoy, all right. A lot of people did.

"Sure," Shayne said. "Preaching and politics. Is he inside?"

Lucy nodded. "With his assistant. They want to see you."

Shayne frowned, his craggy red brows shadowing his grey eyes. "What does a big-time evangelist want with me? Besides to save my soul, I mean."

Lucy held out a folded newspaper to him. It was the *Miami Daily News*. Lucy's slim finger pointed out a news story on the front page.

The headline read WOMAN'S BODY FOUND IN MIAMI BEACH. Shayne scanned the story below quickly, noting that the byline was Jack Gilbert's. Even without the byline, he would have recognized the frantic style, the purple prose with which the writer had delivered the story. Gilbert was fairly new at the paper, and he was a constant thorn in the side of Shayne's old friend, veteran reporter Timothy Rourke.

Shayne was able to pick out the pertinent facts from Gilbert's story, though. The body of a woman named Mary Ann McCoy had been found in an alley in Miami Beach, not far from Biscayne Bay. She had died from multiple stab wounds, and so far the police had made no arrests, though Chief of Police Peter Painter promised that action would be forthcoming shortly. Shayne snorted. Painter had been making that promise for years, and it was only rarely that anything

came of it.

Shayne tossed the paper back on the desk. "I'm sure Tim's upset," he said. "He used to get those stories, before Gilbert's uncle bought the paper. And he did a better job on them. Is the dead woman any relation to the Reverend?"

"I don't know. They didn't tell me anything about why they wanted to see you. But I had seen the story in the paper earlier, and I remembered the name."

"Good work, Angel. At least I'll have an idea of what to expect."

SHAYNE WENT OVER TO THE DOOR AND SWUNG IT OPEN briskly. He stepped into the inner office and put a slight smile on his face as he nodded to the two men who stood up and turned around at his entrance.

"Gentlemen," he said. "I'm Mike Shayne. Can I help you?"

The older of the two men stepped forward and extended a bony hand. "Jeremiah McCoy," he said. "God bless you, Mr. Shayne. I'm glad to meet you."

Shayne could tell from the tone of voice that the blessing was a thing of habit with this man. McCoy was an inch or so under six feet and whipcord thin, but Shayne could feel power in his grip. Thick glasses magnified startling blue eyes. There was a grimness about McCoy's face that Shayne also thought was habitual. He didn't look like a man who went looking for the goodness in the world.

McCoy released Shayne's hand and nodded to the younger man. "My personal assistant and associate pastor of my church, Reverend Jared White."

White shook hands and said, "Mr. Shayne." He was much younger than McCoy, in his mid thirties, Shayne guessed, with dark curly hair and the look of a high school athlete gone slightly to fat. Both men wore conservative suits and ties, and they could just as well have been salesmen of some sort, rather than evangelists, except for the fiery intensity in their eyes.

Shayne sat down behind his big desk as they settled back into their chairs, and he said, "What can I do for you, Reverend?"

His question was directed at McCoy. There was no doubt that the older man was in charge. He leaned forward and said, "I want you to find a killer, Mr. Shayne. I'm prepared to pay you quite well."

"That always helps," Shayne said bluntly. "But you'd better start at the beginning. Is this about the murder of Mary Ann McCoy?"

Shayne wouldn't have thought it was possible, but McCoy's face got even more grim. "That's right. I want you to find her murderer, so

that he can be punished for his sin."

Shayne didn't want to ask the question, but McCoy wasn't going to volunteer any information. "She was your . . . daughter?"

"My niece. But I loved her like a daughter, Mr. Shayne. She was my only living relative. Now she's gone, struck down by evil."

Shayne clasped his hands together on the desk and said, "I'm sure the police are working on your niece's murder, Reverend. Why do you want to bring in a private detective?"

"Because that man will never find her killer," McCoy snapped.

"That man?"

"Chief Painter," White explained. "Reverend McCoy and I were not impressed by him."

"You're not the first. But he can be fairly efficient at times. What's the trouble in this case?"

"He told us — " McCoy began. "He told me that Mary Ann — " Emotion overcame him, and he had to fall silent as he brought himself under control. Shayne couldn't tell which emotion was uppermost, sorrow or anger.

White said gently, "Chief Painter told us that Mary Ann was a prostitute and that he thinks she was killed by one of her customers or by her . . . pimp." White's face twisted, too, but he took a deep breath and went on. "Neither one of us got the impression that Chief Painter placed a high priority on the case."

Shayne nodded. "That sounds like Painter. If the circumstances weren't quite so sordid, the case would make good headlines, and then you'd see Painter go to work, but as it is . . ."

"You don't understand, Mr. Shayne!" McCoy exclaimed. "I don't believe it; I don't believe a word of it."

Shayne frowned. "You don't believe what?"

"I refuse to believe that my niece was . . . that kind of woman. It's impossible! I think there's a coverup here, Mr. Shayne. I think that man Painter has something to hide, and I want you to find out what it is. Find Mary Ann's killer for me, Mr. Shayne. I'm telling you, there's something else behind this, something monstrous!"

McCoy's voice had risen until it rang in the office. Shayne could see why he was such a powerful figure in the pulpit, why he was beginning to gain the ears of important people in all walks of life, from politics to business.

Shayne's mind went back over what he knew about McCoy. The man was the pastor of a small church in northern Florida, a few hours north of Miami, and he had turned a local anti-indecency crusade into a

nationwide movement, attacking what he saw as immorality in almost every aspect of modern life. Shayne had never paid much attention to the newspaper stories about the man's crusade, but the existence of it had stuck in his mind, the way nearly everything he read did.

Given McCoy's position, he could understand why the evangelist was reluctant to believe that his niece was a hooker. Shayne had no way of knowing what the truth of the situation was, though, until he had looked into it. *If he took the case . . .*

"I don't know, Reverend," he said. "Painter and I aren't the best of friends, and he might not like it if I go poking around in a case that's still open."

McCoy allowed the tiniest smile Shayne had ever seen to lift the corners of his grim mouth. "I know how you and the chief feel about each other, Mr. Shayne. That's why I came to you. And Jared says you have quite a reputation for being good at your job."

Shayne reached up and tugged gently on the lobe of his left ear, an unconscious gesture that always showed up when he was concentrating. He had just locked horns with Painter on his last case, the one that had put him in the hospital for several days, and he knew the dandified little chief would still be feeling a lot of resentment. But there *were* those hospital bills to pay . . .

"All right," Shayne said. "I'll look into it for you."

"Excellent," McCoy said. "Jared, write Mr. Shayne a check."

White took a checkbook from his pocket and said, "How much will you need as a retainer, Mr. Shayne?"

"A couple of thousand will do."

White wrote out a check while McCoy said, "I'm glad you've taken the case, Mr. Shayne. I have great confidence in you. I'm sure you'll ferret out the evildoers. You'll be an instrument of the Lord, on a quest to smite the wicked! You don't mind if I offer up a small prayer, do you?"

Shayne lifted an eyebrow and said, "Go right ahead," and as McCoy and White bowed their heads and McCoy began to pray in a fervent voice, Shayne reflected that a lot of things had happened in this office, but this was a first!

And he was damn sure that no one had ever referred to him as an instrument of the Lord . . .

II

SHAYNE GOT THE NAME OF THE HOTEL where McCoy and White were staying and had Lucy type up a contract for them. When the two

preachers and crusaders were gone, Lucy asked, "What was it about, Michael? The girl who was killed over in Miami Beach?"

"Right the first time, Angel," Shayne said. "The girl was McCoy's niece. The Beach cops say she was a hooker, and they think one of her johns or her pimp killed her. Painter's not going to go all out on it. McCoy doesn't like that, and he doesn't buy the story about her being a hooker, either. He wants me to dig the truth out."

"Painter won't like you being involved. He hasn't forgiven you for last time, when you exposed that corrupt detective of his."

Shayne grinned. "Petey and I have been jousting with each other for years. What can he do, hang me?"

Lucy shook her head. "You'd take any case if it meant you got to go up against Painter, wouldn't you, Michael?"

Shayne snagged his hat off the rack. He ignored Lucy's question and said, "I'll be back later, Angel. I think I'll take a little trip across the bay."

IT TOOK HIM HALF AN HOUR TO REACH MIAMI BEACH police headquarters, and when he got there, he went upstairs to the chief's office. He asked the attractive secretary, "Am I still persona non grata around here, or can I go on in?"

The secretary let herself smile a little and said, "I don't think that would be a good idea, Mr. Shayne. The chief might burst a blood vessel."

"Good enough reason right there," Shayne grinned, stepping past her desk and opening the door into Painter's private office before she could make a move to stop him.

Painter glanced up from his massive desk, saw who had just entered the room, and looked as if he had just bitten into something sour. He stood up quickly, and even with the lifts in his shoes, he had to look up to meet Shayne's eyes.

"You can just turn around and get out of here, Shayne," Painter snapped. "We don't have anything to say to each other."

"Still mad at me, eh, Petey? I figured you'd be over it by now."

"You cost me a good man, Shayne," Painter said tightly. "I won't forget that."

Shayne returned Painter's hard glance. "That good man had been breaking the law he was sworn to uphold for years, and you know it. So you can just lay off about that. I did you a favor."

Painter took a deep breath, making a visible effort to keep his hostility under control. "Whatever you want, Shayne, spit it out. You probably won't get it, but I'll at least listen."

"I'm working on the Mary Ann McCoy case now. I wanted to notify you of it, and find out if there's anything on it you can give me."

Shayne's keen eyes saw the tightness set in around Painter's mouth, the sudden narrowing of the dapper little chief's eyes. But Painter said only, "McCoy? Let me think. I don't remember any McCoy case . . ."

"She was killed last night. Stabbed to death over by the Bay."

"Oh, of course." Painter shrugged his shoulders. "She was a well-known prostitute. I imagine she either held out on her pimp or one of her customers wanted something she wasn't prepared to give him and got angry when she refused. Things like that happen pretty often in that life. We're looking into it."

"Kind of nonchalant about it, aren't you? Especially since the girl's uncle is Jeremiah McCoy."

Painter came out from behind his desk. "Did that old man hire you?" he demanded, his composure slipping away. "He was in here for an hour early this morning, telling me how to do my job and trying to convert me at the same time! I tried to explain things to him and to that assistant of his, but neither of them seemed to want to hear the truth. I can't have my men just drop everything and concentrate on a case like this. If it was one of the girl's customers, we may never find out who killed her. Her uncle just couldn't accept that though."

"Do you blame him?" Shayne asked harshly.

Painter frowned. "No, I suppose I don't; Shayne. I can even see why he came to you. But I don't want you sticking your nose in our investigation, regardless of the circumstances. You hear what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, I hear," Shayne grunted. "You're warning me off."

"Take it however you please. I think that's all we've got to say to each other, Shayne. I want you out of this office."

Shayne stared at him bleakly for a moment, then turned and went to the door. His hand was on the knob when Painter spoke again and stopped him.

"Listen, Shayne," he said, and his voice was a little less angry. "The best thing you can do for this Reverend McCoy is tell him to take his niece back home, bury her, and forget it. He's only going to cause himself more pain by hiring a shamus to dig into her past."

"Your concern in touching," Shayne said dryly. "Be seeing you, Petey."

He closed the door behind him, threw a wave at the secretary, and stalked out.

THE VISIT WITH PAINTER HADN'T GIVEN HIM ANYTHING

concrete to start with but Shayne felt like it had been worth the time. He had seen the tension on the chief's face, and the way Painter had tried to pass the case off as a minor one. Painter had been lying about that, and there was no reason for him to lie unless Jeremiah McCoy had been right. There was something about the case that Peter Painter wanted covered up.

Shayne was glad he had taken the case now; he was intrigued by whatever had Painter so shaken up. And he was determined to find out just what the real story was.

The only starting place he had was the apartment complex where Mary Ann McCoy had made her home. It was only a couple of blocks from the murder scene, Shayne recalled from Jack Gilbert's newspaper story. He turned the nose of his Buick in that direction.

It didn't take him long to find the apartment house. The complex was within sight of Biscayne Bay, on a street that was lined with similar complexes and small stores. Shayne parked underneath a palm tree and got out of the car.

His long legs carried him down the street. He passed the mouth of an alley and knew from the address of the store beside it that this was where the body of Mary Ann McCoy had been discovered. There was nothing to indicate it as such now, but Shayne paused and stared down the narrow alley for a moment anyway.

A man came out of the store, which Shayne now noticed was a tobacco shop, and said, "Yep, that's where it happened, all right."

Shayne shot him a quizzical glance. "Where what happened?"

"You know, that whore who got killed last night. Right here by my shop, too. Gives me the damn creeps."

Shayne had seen a lot of curious thrill-seekers who flocked to the scenes of tragedies. They had always reminded him of vultures. Now he put a similar expression on his face and said, "Hey, you must be the one who found her."

The shop owner shook his head violently. "Not me, buddy. And I'm glad I didn't, from what I hear. They say she was cut up pretty bad."

"Wonder who did it?"

The man shrugged. "With a girl like that, who knows? Could have been a lot of guys. I've got to say I'm not surprised. I've been expecting some kind of trouble ever since those girls started moving in."

"What girls?" The man seemed eager to talk, and Shayne wasn't going to discourage him.

"Those whores. There's a whole bunch of them down there in the apartments. The manager don't like it, but they don't conduct their

business there, and they always pay their rent, so there's not much he can do about it. I don't mind 'em myself, some of them seem like nice enough girls if you don't think about what they do for a living. And they buy a lot of cigarettes from me."

Shayne nodded. "I hope they catch the guy who did it."

"Me, too. We don't need any Jack the Ripper type around here. That damn pimp is bad enough."

"One pimp for all those girls?"

"One of that kind is enough. He's a damn troublemaker." The man launched into a series of racial insults, and it was no trouble for Shayne to guess that the pimp in question was black. The big detective stood there and listened to the invective for a moment, then said, "Well; I guess I'd better get on my way."

"Need any cigarettes or cigars?" the shop owner asked quickly.

"No, thanks." Shayne moved off down the street, toward the apartments. He glanced back over his shoulder and was thankful when he saw the store owner going back inside with a customer.

SHAYNE WALKED INTO THE COURTYARD OF THE COMPLEX and raised his eyebrows slightly at what he saw. Three women were lounging in deck chairs around a swimming pool, and the total fabric in their bathing suits wouldn't make a shirt for Shayne. Two of them were brunettes, the third one a redhead. All of them wore dark glasses, but that didn't stop them from seeing Shayne walking toward them.

He stopped in front of them, nodded politely, and said, "Hello, ladies. I wonder if I could talk to you for a moment."

One of the brunettes said, "Are you selling anything?"

Shayne resisted the impulse to make a smart crack and said, "Not a thing."

The other brunette said, "Then you must be a cop."

Shayne shook his head.

Mike Shayne had seen a lot of beautiful women in his time, but rarely had he seen so much smooth, creamy female flesh at one time. All three of the girls were lovely. The two brunettes could have almost been twins; they both had lush, ripe figures, the bikini tops barely able to contain the thrusting curves of their breasts. The redhead was a little thinner but every bit as sleek and attractive. There was a coating of oil on her fair skin to protect it from the rays of the hot sun, and Shayne could see a small sprinkling of freckles beginning to appear on the bridge of her nose.

He said, "I'm looking for someone who knew Mary Ann McCoy. Did any of you know her?"

"Sure," the redhead said. "We all knew her. What's it to you?"

One of the brunettes took her sunglasses off and said, "I don't know if you ought to talk to this guy or not, Terry. He may deny it, but he sure looks like a cop to me."

"Don't worry about it, Brenda," the girl called Terry said. "He doesn't scare me, no matter how big he is." She turned the dark glasses back toward Shayne and said, "You didn't answer my question, mister. What's your interest in Mary Ann?"

Shayne considered telling the girl who he really was, then decided against it. It was too early in the case to lay his cards on the table. "It's about a personal matter," he said.

"I'll bet," Terry said. "It always is."

The other brunette stared up at Shayne and suddenly said, "You sure look familiar. Have we met?"

"I don't think so," Shayne grunted. "So all of you knew Mary Ann McCoy, but you don't want to talk about her, is that it?"

"You never asked any more questions," Terry said, her bored face twisting into a sneer. "What are we supposed to do, read your mind? What do you want to know?"

"For one thing, do you know who might have wanted to kill her?"

That did it. The brunettes both sat up, threatening the already straining bathing suits, and one of them said, "You're right, mister. I don't want to talk about it. I won't talk about it!"

They both stood up and stalked away, heading for one of the apartments and leaving the redheaded Terry there to look mockingly up at Shayne. "What about you?" the big detective said. "Do you want to talk about what happened to Mary Ann McCoy?"

Before the young woman had a chance to answer, a new voice broke into the conversation. "Hey, brother!" a man called from behind Shayne. "Hold on there!"

SHAYNE LOOKED OVER HIS SHOULDER and saw a black man striding into the courtyard. The newcomer was big, almost as tall as Shayne, with brawny shoulders and arms left bare by a bright tank top. He wore a broad-brimmed hat that shaded his eyes, tight pants, and boots that looked like they had cost several hundred dollars. As he approached, he pointed a finger at Shayne and said irritably, "Listen, friend, that lady don't talk to nobody unless I says for her to."

"And just who are you?" Shayne asked, even though he had a pretty good idea.

"I'm the man who takes care of all these ladies," the man said proudly. "They calls me Poppa Bear. Ain't that right, Terry?"

"Sure, Poppa Bear," Terry said dispiritedly.

"I was just asking a few questions," Shayne said.

"About Mary Ann," Terry put in. "He seemed real interested in her, Poppa."

The eyes of the man called Poppa Bear narrowed. He said, "You a cop, sucker?"

Shayne shook his head. "Just curious."

"Curious ain't good for you, man. A fella can get hurt bein' curious."

Shayne was getng tired of this exchange. The pimp rubbed him the wrong way with his arrogant posturing. Shayne said, "Forget it, then. I'll just find somebody else to tell me what I want to know."

He started to walk past Poppa Bear, but the man reached out and grabbed his arm. "Hold on there, dude," Poppa Bear gritted. "Before you leave, I want to hear you tell me you ain't goin' to come around here no more. You might upset my little girls, and that upsets me."

Shayne looked down coldly at the blunt fingers clasping his arm and then raised his eyes to stare into Poppa Bear's dark ones. "I don't like being threatened," he said simply.

The man laughed. "Ain't no threat, dude. It's a promise. You come back here, you askin' for trouble."

"Let go of my arm."

"You gonna make me?"

It was there in the man's voice, the note of false bravado that was common to all bullies and cowards, from the schoolyard to the back alleys to the corporation boardrooms. And Shayne knew there was only one real answer to it.

He pulled his arm loose.

Anger suffused Poppa Bear's face, and he launched a swing at Shayne's head. Shayne dipped below it calmly and drove his right fist into the man's belly as hard as he could. As Poppa Bear's breath whooshed out of him, Shayne brought his left up, clipping the wide chin and snapping Poppa Bear's head back. The soft felt hat fell off as Poppa Bear crumpled in a heap.

Terry had watched the brief fight with the same sardonic look on her face. It didn't change as she said to Shayne, "You're tough, mister, whoever you are. But I sure as hell wouldn't want to be in your shoes now. You've just made a bad enemy."

Shayne looked down at the half-conscious form of Poppa Bear and said, "I don't think so."

"Think what you want." Terry smiled. "But you'd better watch your back from now on, if you want to keep on living."

III

SHAYNE STOPPED FOR SOME LUNCH, since the clock had gone around past noon, and then called Lucy Hamilton to report his lack of success so far. About all he had discovered for sure was that Painter had been telling at least part of the truth: Mary Ann McCoy had been a prostitute. But he still had a nagging suspicion about the case, based on Painter's nervousness.

His next stop was the hotel where Jeremiah McCoy was staying. The clerk at the desk sent Shayne up to the sumptuous suite that McCoy had booked for himself and White.

White answered Shayne's knock on the door. "Mr. Shayne! We didn't expect to see you so soon. Praise the Lord! You've had results already?"

"Yeah, some," Shayne grunted, stepping into the suite. White had a Bible in his hand, a finger marking his place, and as Shayne looked around the big room, he saw Jeremiah McCoy sitting on a sofa, a Bible open in his hands.

"We were just having a little Bible study," McCoy said as he stood up. He and White were still wearing their suits, and Shayne saw that they hadn't even loosened their ties. McCoy marked his place in the book with a gilt strip and placed it on a coffee table. He turned to Shayne with an anxious look on his face. "What have you found out, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne took a deep breath, wishing they weren't both staring at him so intently. He said, "First of all, I'm convinced that Peter Painter didn't tell you the full truth about the investigation into your niece's death. He tried to give me the same story he gave you, but I didn't buy it. I've known Painter for a long time, and I know when he's got the wind up about something. This is one of those times."

"What else, Mr. Shayne? I'm sure you know more than that."

"Yeah, I do." Shayne started to reach into his pocket for a cigarette, then refrained. "I went to the place where your niece lived, and one thing was obvious. I know you don't want to hear this, Reverend McCoy, but it's obvious to me that Mary Ann was a prostitute. I talked to some of the other girls, and even to her pimp. Sorry."

McCoy was shaking his head silently, and White said, "It's so . . . so unbelievable. She was such a sweet, pure girl. We all loved her. She even used to sing in the choir."

Shayne repressed the snort that he felt. White's words were unashamedly corny, and the young minister didn't seem to realize how he sounded. Shayne thought he detected a note of nostalgic affection in

White's tone, and he wondered if there had ever been anything between White and Mary Ann. If he was to continue on this case, he'd have to find out more about the backgrounds of the people involved.

McCoy was saying something under his breath, and Shayne thought he was praying. McCoy suddenly looked up and asked, "What are you going to do now, Mr. Shayne? Not that I believe what you told me about Mary Ann being . . . like that, but I still trust you to investigate her death."

Shayne felt a little bit like he had been insulted, but he decided to pass over it. He knew that most things were either black or white in the mind of a man like McCoy, and there was no use in taking offense at what the evangelist said.

"I've got to find out more about Mary Ann," he said. "The key to a person's death is usually in their life somewhere, if you just keep digging until you find it. And that's the kind of thing I'm good at."

"I can believe that," McCoy said. "A servant of the Lord must be dogged in his determination. I think you're that kind of man."

"What can we do to help you?" White asked.

They were all still standing. Shayne said, "Why don't we sit down, and then you can answer some questions about Mary Ann for me?"

McCoy raised a hand to his face and rubbed his temples lightly. "I don't believe I feel very well, Mr. Shayne, but I'm sure Jared wouldn't mind helping you. He's been with me for several years, and he can tell you anything I could. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go lie down, perhaps meditate a little bit."

Before Shayne could stop himself, he said, "I thought meditation was part of the Eastern religions."

McCoy's face tightened. "Communing with God knows no boundaries, Mr. Shayne. God is everywhere. Even in Miami."

THERE WAS NOTHING SHAYNE COULD SAY TO THAT. McCoy left the room, going into one of the bedrooms that opened off the sitting room. White waved Shayne into a comfortable armchair and sat down on the sofa.

"Now, Mr. Shayne," White said, "just what is it you want to know?" He leaned forward, a sincere smile on his open face.

"First of all," Shayne said, "just where do you fit into this set-up? I know you're Reverend McCoy's associate, but just how much a part of the family are you?"

White's smile widened. "Enough to be able to answer your questions about Mary Ann, if that's what you're concerned about. I believe Jeremiah told you that Mary Ann was his only living relative. I flatter

myself by thinking that he looks on me as the son he never had."

"You've been partners for a long time?"

"Oh, we're hardly partners. Jeremiah founded SIN, and he's still our guiding force, our father, so to speak. I just take care of the administrative details so that he'll have time for the important work."

"SIN?" Shayne's eyebrows went up.

"Stop Immorality Now," White explained. "Our crusade to save the people from the flood of filth that is bombarding them from all sides, masked in the guise of sophisticated modern living."

Shayne held his hand up. "Wait a minute. I thought you just handled administration."

White's smile took on a rueful look. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. Spreading the word is really Jeremiah's job. I just get carried away sometimes. It's just that I believe so strongly in what we're trying to do."

"Okay. Tell me about Mary Ann. You're familiar with her history?"

"I've known her since she was a young girl." A brief flash of emotion washed over White's face. "She . . . she really was a lovely girl." He looked up suddenly. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Shayne. There was nothing between us other than pure Christian love, the love between spiritual brother and sister. But her death . . . has affected me, too, as well as Jeremiah."

White was talking a lot, but he wasn't telling Shayne what he wanted to know. Shayne asked, "What happened to Mary Ann's parents?"

"They were both killed in a car crash when she was nine. She came to live with Jeremiah then, and she stayed with him until last year."

"Why did she leave?"

"She was twenty years old." White lifted his shoulders in a shrug. "I suppose she wanted to be independent, to try her wings on her own. It's a common feeling in young people. I remember when I was twenty, I thought I had all the answers. It took Jeremiah and the Good Lord to show me that I was wrong. I didn't even have all the questions."

"How did Reverend McCoy feel about her leaving home?"

"He was against it, of course. He knew how many temptations there are out in the world for a young person. He was afraid that Mary Ann wasn't strong enough to resist them." White sighed. "It looks like he was right. You see, Mr. Shayne, I believe what you say about Mary Ann being a prostitute. I don't like it, but I know you have no reason to lie about it. I think Jeremiah knows you're telling the truth, too, but he can't bring himself to admit it, even to himself."

"It's the truth, all right," Shayne said. "And it's going to complicate things."

"How's that?"

"Anytime a hooker gets killed, you've automatically got a lot of suspects, from her pimp to her customers to the other hookers she knows. Pardon my bluntness, but that's the situation. If something else is behind Mary Ann's death, it's going to be that much harder to find because of all the clutter we'll have to dig through first."

White nodded. "I can understand that. But I'm sure you'll do your best, Mr. Shayne."

"How were things between Reverend McCoy and Mary Ann? Were they in contact?"

"Oh, certainly. We're only located a few hours drive from here, and Jeremiah visited frequently. I came along sometimes, but not every time, of course. As far as I could tell, there was no friction between the two of them."

"But neither of you had any idea of what Mary Ann did for a living?"

White shook his head. "She never spoke about it, and we didn't ask her. I got the feeling that Jeremiah didn't want to antagonize her by asking a lot of questions. He still hoped she would come home when she got her fill of being out on her own."

"Did Mary Ann ever mention any enemies she had?"

"Never. She was such a sweet child, I don't think she could make an enemy if she tried."

"Wrong," Shayne said. "She made at least one."

He was ready to leave, feeling that he had gotten all out of this interview that he was going to. He stood up, shook hands with White, and promised to keep in touch.

PAUSING OUTSIDE THE DOOR OF THE SUITE, Shayne lit a cigarette and reflected, tugging on his earlobe. He was beginning to get a picture of Mary Ann McCoy, and it was one he had seen before. A young girl from a fairly repressive background, coming to the big city on her own, determined to experience life. It was an old story, and it usually had a less than happy ending. Life with a capital L was rarely as rewarding as they had expected it to be, and they wound up compromising in one way or another in order to survive.

Shayne remembered more of the stories he had read about McCoy and his organization, his memory jogged by White's mention of the crusade's acronym, SIN. Feeling that immoral values were pervasive throughout modern society, McCoy and his followers were always boycotting and protesting movies, television programs, books, magazines, and anything and everything else they found offensive. He re-

membered Tim Rourke commenting angrily on the massive bonfire that had really started McCoy's rise to national prominence, a bonfire fueled by books, magazines, television sets, records, and posters. If it had anything to do with sex, Communism, drugs, or alcohol, McCoy didn't want anything to do with it, and he passed his feelings on to his congregation.

Shayne gave a mental shrug and boarded the elevator when it arrived in answer to his summons. What people believed was up to them, and unless it had a bearing on the case he was working on, he wasn't inclined to worry about it much. He thought instead about what his next move should be as the elevator carried him down to the lobby, and he decided that his best bet might be the redhead girl at the apartments, Terry. She was a hooker, too, who had known Mary Ann McCoy, and more importantly, Shayne had the feeling that she might have talked to him eventually if they hadn't been interrupted by Poppa Bear. Maybe if he took another shot at her, he could get some information about the recent events in Mary Ann's life.

He was striding through the lobby when some sixth sense made him swivel his head around and glance toward the entrance of the hotel lounge. Two men were standing there, and their air of nonchalance was just a little too studied. Shayne let his eyes sweep over them quickly, not dwelling on them, and he headed on toward the sidewalk. His Buick was parked at the curb down the street, and as he walked toward it, he contrived to get a look behind him in a plate glass window. One of the two men he had noticed was coming out of the hotel and turning in the same direction.

Shayne got into his car, still paying no attention to the man behind him, even though his every instinct told him that the man was a tail. He started the car, pulled away from the curb, and drove leisurely toward the beachfront luxury hotels. Traffic picked up, and as Shayne turned the Buick into a busy boulevard, he saw another car make the turn behind him. The man he had spotted earlier was at the wheel.

Shayne's mouth curved in a tight grin. This was interesting. There had been two men at the hotel. One of them was following him now. Where was the other one? Back at the hotel keeping an eye on McCoy and White?

THE TAIL DIDN'T HAVE THE LOOK OF A COP ABOUT HIM, but Shayne wouldn't put such a tactic past Peter Painter. Whoever the guy was, Shayne decided, he could worry about him later. He let the man stay behind him as he drove back across Miami Beach, took one

of the causeways over Biscayne Bay, and went to his office. He filled Lucy in on everything that had happened during the day and described the tail and the car he was driving to her.

— “It sounds like you don’t have much to go on, Michael,” she commented when he was through.

“I don’t, Angel,” Shayne admitted. “But I’m going to keep after it. Painter’s afraid I’m going to find out something he doesn’t want me to, and I don’t want to let him down.”

“How’s your leg?”

Shayne had a hip perched on the corner of Lucy’s desk, with the leg in question swinging freely an inch or so off the floor. Shayne smiled and said, “You’d never know I took a bullet in it. It feels as good as new, Angel.”

“What are you going to do next?”

“I want to talk to that hooker again — and don’t look so disapproving; you’re not one of McCoy’s SIN-ers.”

“Michael . . . What are you talking about?”

He explained with a laugh, then said, “The first thing on the agenda is a good dinner, though. Care to join me?”

“What about the man following you?”

“I’m tempted to say let him get his own date . . . ”

“Michael — ”

“Yeah, Angel?”

“Resist the temptation.”

Shayne nodded solemnly, ran a thumbnail along his jawline in mock contemplation, and then they both broke out laughing.

IV

SHAYNE DIDN’T LET THE FACT THAT THEY WERE still being followed ruin their dinner. He and Lucy dined at one of their favorite restaurants, and Shayne thoroughly enjoyed the thick steak and the bottle of vintage Martell. Not until they were lingering over Irish coffee did the subject of the current case come up again.

Lucy said, “I suppose you’ll be heading back to the apartments where the girl lived now?”

“Right, Angel. Terry may not be there, but it’s the only place I’ve got to start looking for her.”

“What about the man who’s following you?”

The man in question was across the room, dining alone at a small table and trying to look inconspicuous. He was doing a pretty good job of it, and Shayne might not have noticed him had he not spotted the

man at the hotel earlier. Shayne didn't look at him now as he said, "I think it's time to lose him. I thought he might do something to give away just who he is, but I'm not in the mood to wait any longer. Are you up to some evasive maneuvers?"

"Of course, Michael. Lead the way."

Shayne paid the check and then walked arm in arm with Lucy into the restaurant parking lot. They were in the Buick and pulling out onto the street when Shayne saw in his rear view mirror the tail scrambling into his own car and starting after them.

Shayne had lived in Miami for a long time, and he knew its streets intimately. He whipped the Buick around a corner, gave it some gas, then turned again abruptly. The following car stayed with him for a couple of moves, but the gap between them was widening all the time, and it was only a matter of minutes before the pursuer was no longer anywhere to be seen.

"You've never lost your touch, have you?" Lucy said admiringly.

"I'd better not, in this business," Shayne replied.

He dropped her off at her apartment a few minutes later, stopping only long enough to see her safely inside and kiss her good night. Then he cruised over to Biscayne Boulevard, turned onto one of the causeways, and headed for Miami Beach.

Shayne kept one eye on the rear view mirror, but there was no further sign of the tail.

IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG to reach the apartment complex where Mary Ann McCoy had lived. He was looking for a parking place when a flicker of movement in the courtyard caught his eye.

The redhead girl called Terry was striding out of the courtyard onto the sidewalk, and as Shayne watched from down the block, she turned and walked quickly down the street.

Reaching there just before she left was a stroke of luck, Shayne knew, and he wasn't going to let it go to waste. He drove slowly down the block, keeping an eye on her, until she turned at the corner. There was a vacant space at the curb, so Shayne piloted the Buick into it and got out.

The girl seemed to be hurrying, her high heels clicking out a staccato rhythm on the sidewalk. She would throw an occasional glance back over her shoulder, but she didn't seem to have noticed Shayne. He could understand why she would be a little nervous. People tend to react that way when violence strikes down someone they know.

He gave her a lead of a block and then started after her on foot. If asked, Shayne wouldn't have been able to say why he followed behind

her, instead of just catching up and questioning her the way he had intended. It was an instinctive thing with him, knowing when to play a hunch. And now his instincts said to hang back.

The occasional glow of a streetlight showed Shayne that the girl was dressed in a blue dress of some clingy material, with a slit up the side nearly to her hip. There was a provocative air to her walk, and it looked obvious to Shayne that she was on the lookout for a customer. He frowned slightly. He hadn't figured her as the type to walk the streets. There was more than a touch of class in the way she looked and acted, and he had her pegged as the more expensive call girl type. It looked like he was wrong.

A car cruised past him, and then brake lights flared as it drew abreast of the girl. The driver leaned through the open window and said something to the girl. She shook her head again, and the driver waved a hand at her disgustedly. He drove away with a squeal of tires.

Shayne had stopped in a patch of shadow when the girl stopped to talk to the driver of the car. He was hanging well back, trying to stay in the shadows as much as possible. Again, it was just a hunch telling him what to do. Now the girl moved on again, and Shayne started after her.

She was looking over her shoulder even more than before, and Shayne found it harder staying out of her sight. Possibly the encounter with the driver had spooked her in some way. Shayne couldn't figure that. She should have been used to being accosted by strange men on the streets.

He didn't have much time to wonder about that. Suddenly, Terry turned off the sidewalk, disappearing from Shayne's view. He picked up his pace. He couldn't tell where she had gone; there had to be an opening of some kind, either an alley or a doorway. But he knew he didn't want to lose her. There were still questions he wanted to ask.

WHEN HE REACHED THE SPOT where he had lost sight of her, a worried frown drew his brows down. There was an alley there, a dark, narrow lane between a small grocery store and a garage. This was certainly not a good place for a young girl to be at night. Shayne was surprised that she would venture into such a place, especially after Mary Ann McCoy's body had been found in just such an alley.

She had to have gone in there for a reason, perhaps to meet someone. One thing was for sure, it hadn't been a random choice. She wouldn't find any potential tricks down such a desolate alley.

Shayne paused outside the alley for only a moment, just long enough for those thoughts to run through his head and for him to check his pis-

tol in its shoulder holster. Then he started down the alley after the girl.

He had only gone a few feet when he realized that something was wrong. No longer could he hear the clicking of her heels as she walked. She had either stopped or taken her shoes off. Shayne moved carefully. The darkness in the alley was nearly complete, relieved only by a faint glow that filtered in from the street.

Shayne was about twenty feet into the alley when his nerves suddenly screamed a warning at him. There had been a sound behind him, only a faint whisper of movement, but that was enough. He threw himself to the side.

He realized too late that he had been suckered, that he had moved just the way his attacker wanted. Hands clamped down on his arm and heaved. Shayne felt his feet coming off the ground as the attacker used the judo throw. He grabbed for his gun, but he was falling too fast, and he landed on his shoulder. Pain shot down his arm. His fingers refused to work for a moment, and the gun slipped from them.

A sharp-pointed shoe dug into his stomach, driving some of the air from his lungs. As he tried to struggle to his feet, a cold ring of steel suddenly pressed itself to his head. "Be still," a voice said, and it was almost as cold as the steel.

Shayne did like she said, cursing himself mentally for a second. He had played right into her hands. She must have spotted him before she ever went into the alley. That was why she had turned down the man in the car: she was baiting a trap for him.

But why?

THAT QUESTION WASN'T LONG IN BEING ANSWERED. The girl called Terry kept the gun pressed to Shayne's head and said, "You'd better have a damn good explanation for following me, mister, or you're going to be in the slammer so fast you won't believe it."

A cop . . . ! Shayne might have laughed, if he hadn't been lying in a dirty alley with a gun to his head. Instead, he said, "Take it easy, Terry. We're on the same side."

"Keep talking. You haven't convinced me yet."

"Listen, I'm a private detective, and I'm investigating Mary Ann McCoy's murder. You're obviously an undercover cop, so what are you investigating?"

"A private eye? You expect me to believe that when you tail me down this alley? I think you killed that poor girl, you bastard!"

Shayne was getting a little tired of this. His position was uncomfortable, and he was ready to change it. Without warning, he moved.

His leg lashed out, knocking the girl's feet out from under her. At

the same time, he jerked his head to the side and grabbed at the gun. He didn't want a shot. His finger slipped into the trigger guard, behind the trigger, so that the girl couldn't fire. She let out a gasp as she fell on top of him.

Shayne looped his other arm around her and rolled over, bringing her beneath him. His weight pinned her down effectively, and he plucked the gun from her hand.

Their faces were only inches apart, and she hissed curses at him as she struggled against him. Shayne barked, "Goddamn it, hold on! I'm not going to hurt you. I told you, I'm a private detective."

The girl stopped fighting and sighed. "All right, all right. Now get off me, you big ape. I can't breathe!"

Shayne rolled off her and stood up quickly, ready for her to try something else. All she did was stand up and begin to brush some of the alley's grime off of her dress, though.

"You got too close to me once you threw me," Shayne said. "You should have backed off, out of grabbing range."

"I don't need any lessons from you," Terry said disgustedly. "You really are a PI, aren't you?"

"That's right. What convinced you?"

"You were trying not to hurt me, even while we were wrestling around. The Stalker wouldn't have been so worried about it."

"The Stalker?"

"How about telling me who you are first, then we'll talk."

She seemed totally in control of herself again, her voice cool and calm. You never would have known that she had just been in a fight, brief as it had been. Shayne said, "I told you, I'm working on the Mary McCoy case. My name is Mike Shayne."

The girl gave an ironic chuckle. "I should have known. I've heard a lot about you, Shayne, both from Chief Painter and back home. I should have recognized you this afternoon, but I didn't know you had any connection with this case."

Her words puzzled Shayne. He said, "What do you mean, back home? Just who are you, anyway?"

"Detective Theresa Denton," the girl said. "On special assignment to the Miami Beach Police Department and on loan from the —"

"New Orleans Police Department," Shayne guessed, and his next words were heartfelt. "Oh, hell."

and said, "That's right. I'm on the force in New Orleans. So you see, I know a lot about you, Mr. Shayne."

"And I'll bet most of what you heard was bad," Shayne grunted. "Are you his daughter?"

"Niece. He doesn't send his greetings, by the way."

"I didn't think he would."

This was a disgusting turn of events. Shayne tried to keep himself prepared for anything, but he had never expected to run into the niece of New Orleans police captain Dolph Denton, and certainly not while he was working on a case.

Dolph Denton had good cause to remember Shayne vividly. Shayne had been a thorn in his side for over a year while operating in the Crescent City. Shayne had a lot of good memories of his time in New Orleans — it was there that he had met Lucy Hamilton, for one thing — but Captain Denton wasn't one of them. If anything, that relationship had been more abrasive than the one between Shayne and Peter Painter. Painter was honest, at least, and that was one thing Denton couldn't always claim.

"Is your uncle still on the force?" Shayne asked Terry.

"Of course. The force is his life, you should remember that. And it's my life as well now, Shayne, and I don't appreciate you interfering with my job. You realize, don't you, that you may have blown my cover?"

Shayne shrugged. "I'm sorry, but there was no way for me to know that you were a cop. For all I knew, you were just another hooker, but you *did* know Mary Ann McCoy. I wanted to ask you some questions."

"And for all I knew, you were a maniac with a knife, ready to do to me what you did to Mary Ann. You think you could give me back my gun now?"

Shayne held it out to her, then picked up his own gun from the concrete of the alley. He said, "I think we've got a lot to talk about. Could we go someplace a little more comfortable to do it?"

"We might as well. I don't suppose you'd just go home and forget about me and Mary Ann McCoy?"

"You know better. Didn't Uncle Dolph ever tell you I was a bulldog on a case?"

Terry snorted. "He did mention something about dogs, but I think he was referring to something else . . ."

Shayne tried to ignore her comments as they walked back to the street. He said, "My car's right over there. Where would you like to go?"

"Back to the apartment, I suppose. You've already messed up to-

night's operation, there's no point in trying again."

"You were trying to lure Mary Ann's killer out into the open, weren't you? You never did explain what you meant by the Stalker."

"I guess I'll have to fill you in on all of it. You won't let go until you know.—Wait a minute!"

THEY HAD JUST REACHED SHAYNE'S CAR. He jerked his head toward her at her exclamation, and he followed her gaze. A car was pulling out of a parking place further up the street, and as they watched, it took off at a high rate of speed. Terry snapped, "Follow him!"

They both leaped into the car, and Shayne sent it in pursuit of the other vehicle. He said, "What is it? Did you spot somebody suspicious?"

"Damn right," Terry said, leaning forward and looking for the tail-lights of the other car intently. "That guy came running out of the shadows and jumped in his car, and he came from the direction of the alley. Damn, he could have been in there with us. He could have heard everything we said!"

If that was the case, then the detective from New Orleans had her cover blown for sure. Shayne kept the accelerator of the Buick pressed down hard, but the other car had too big a lead. It had lost them within a few blocks.

Terry pounded a fist against the dashboard in frustration. "Blast it, if that was the Stalker, then you've really screwed things up royally, Shayne! I didn't even get a good look at the guy."

"Maybe it was that pimp, Poppa Bear," Shayne suggested. "He might not trust you and might have wanted to keep an eye on you."

She shook her head. "I would have recognized Poppa Bear. He's a distinctive figure, to say the least."

Shayne turned the nose of the Buick back towards the apartments. "You never did tell me about this Stalker. Am I going to have to ask again?"

Terry shot him a look tinged with hostility. "You're the hot-shot shamus. Can't you figure it out?"

"All right," Shayne said. "If I had to guess, I'd say that Mary Ann McCoy wasn't the only hooker who's been killed recently. Am I right?"

"You're right," Terry admitted. "There's been six in the last month, all killed the same way. That's why all the girls are so spooked. They're scared that they're going to be next. Some of them want to quit for a while. Poppa Bear won't let them, of course. But how did you know it?"

"I didn't. Like I said, I guessed. You've obviously been working on this job for a while, so it wasn't the McCoy killing that brought you here. There had to have been others before."

"What else have you figured out?"

"That the cops have received some sort of communication from the killer, and that the guy calls himself the Stalker. Right again?"

"Two for two," Terry muttered.

"Painter probably got the first note early in the game and decided to keep the whole thing quiet. I know him, and he wouldn't want the press getting hold of this thing and making another Jack the Ripper out of it. It would be bad publicity for him if he had to admit that somebody's making a monkey out of him and his force."

"Do you blame him for keeping it quiet?" Terry demanded hotly. "You know that most of these psycho killers do it for the publicity as much as anything. They want to be plastered all over the front page, like Son of Sam or the Hillside Strangler or the Zebra Killer. That's why the Chief didn't tell anyone, not even Reverend McCoy. He was afraid the Reverend might go to the papers."

"You've got a point," Shayne admitted grudgingly. "Did you really think I might be your man?"

"You followed me into a dark alley. What was I supposed to think? Besides, you'd been around earlier asking questions about Mary Ann, and I didn't know then that you were the famous Mike Shayne." Sarcasm colored her voice. Shayne thought that he could very easily learn to dislike this lady.

AS HE DROVE THROUGH THE EVENING TRAFFIC toward the apartments, he asked, "Where was your back-up tonight? You didn't go into that alley on your own, did you?"

Terry nodded. "No back-up. Poppa Bear is a suspicious man, Shayne. We didn't want to do anything that might tip him off to the fact that I'm a cop. I'm still relatively new in his stable, so I have to be extra careful."

Shayne glanced at her calm face and said unbelievingly, "You mean Painter lets you go into a situation like that without any back-up? That little twerp!"

"He left it up to me. It's my decision, Shayne. I work better alone."

"It's a good way to wind up dead," Shayne grunted. "If I had been this Stalker character, you'd be carved up back in that alley by now."

"I won't be as careless next time," Terry said tightly.

"Maybe there won't be a next time. Maybe I'll beat you to this killer."

Terry jerked her head in his direction. "Is that a dare?"

Shayne held up a hand. "Wait a minute. Let's not get mixed up in games like that. I was just saying that I'll worry about you if you keep this business up. You ought to get out before you get hurt."

She looked at him calculatingly. "My uncle said you were an arrogant bastard," she said. "He was right."

Shayne bit back the retort that sprang to his lips and concentrated on his driving. After a few minutes, he asked, "What did the notes from the Stalker say? Have you seen them?"

"I've seen them. They've got that same tone that all psycho notes do. The Stalker says he's on a mission to rid Miami Beach of its evil, and I guess he thinks snuffing hookers is a good place to start."

Shayne nodded. "Bringing in an undercover officer from out of town was a good idea," he declared. "Nobody around here knows you. But I still say you should have some back-up if you're determined to keep it up."

"There may not be any point in it," Terry said. "If that guy back there was the Stalker, he may know now that I'm a cop. If he does, he won't come within a mile of me."

"He may not have been the Stalker. You've got no reason to think he was."

"Nothing but my gut feelings. And they say he was the Stalker. Why else would he be in a desolate part of town like that? He was following me just like you were. You just got to me first . . . which is my bad luck."

"You don't like me, do you?"

"How perceptive."

Shayne gave a mental shrug. If she didn't like him, she didn't like him. What was important was that they were bound to interfere with each other's investigation. Shayne didn't see any answer to that problem. He wasn't going to let the case go, and he didn't think Terry Denton would, either.

"You turned that guy in the car down because you were trying to draw me on, right?" he asked.

"I turn everybody down," she said flatly. "So don't get any ideas. Poppa Bear doesn't ask too many questions, as long as I've got plenty of money to turn over to him. And Painter's been free with it for this operation. Everybody at the apartments thinks I'm a great little hooker."

She had an answer for everything, Shayne reflected. This case was

going to be a mess, he could feel it in his bones.

"Do you know if Painter has a tail on me?" he asked, suddenly remembering the man he had shaken earlier.

"Not that I know of," Terry replied. "Of course, I'm not in contact with him much. Why would he have a tail on you?"

"I went to see him earlier in the day and told him I was on the case. He didn't like it much."

"I don't blame him. Policework is hard enough without civilians sticking their noses in."

Shayne gave it up. She was determined to stonewall him, so he would take her back to her place, drop her off, and try to forget about this night. Terry wasn't going to help him any, that was for sure. He'd have to find a new trail elsewhere.

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO REACH THE APARTMENTS. Shayne turned into the parking lot and stopped in a vacant space. Terry opened her door and said, "Thanks for an entertaining evening, Shayne. Let's not do it again sometime."

"The feeling's mutual, Denton," Shayne snapped. She got out of the car and slammed the door. Turning on her heel, she started striding lithely toward the building.

Shayne watched her go with mixed emotions. He was angry with her; there was no point in her being so hostile toward him. But he could understand it, since her view of him was undoubtedly influenced a great deal by her uncle. Frustration was also seething within him. He had thought he had a good lead in her, that she might be able to help him with the case. No such luck.

Despite all that, he couldn't help but feel some admiration for her. She was in a very dangerous position, and she was handling herself with all the aplomb of a much older, more experienced officer, at least most of the time.

And she was lovely, there was no doubt about that.

Shayne was watching the sway of her trim hips as she stalked away, when he was suddenly interrupted by an angry voice.

"Goddamn it, *you* again!"

He turned his head and saw the flamboyant figure of Poppa Bear striding toward the Buick. The pimp was wearing a suit of brightly-colored velvet, with a cape trailing behind it, and what looked like the same broad-brimmed hat, only now it had a feather sticking in its band.

Poppa Bear's face was set in angry lines, and Shayne thought it might be a good idea of he got out of the car. If there was going to be

trouble, he wanted to meet it head on.

He stepped out of the Buick as Poppa Bear hurried up. Terry Denton had stopped and was watching the developments with interest.

The pimp stopped in front of Shayne and snapped, "You still botherin' one of my ladies, mister? I don't like that, no, sir, not at all."

"What you like or dislike isn't my worry," Shayne said. "And if you're so worried about the lady, why don't you ask her if she's bothered?"

"Don't you go tellin' me how to take care of my ladies," Poppa Bear snapped, adding an obscenity. "You just move on outta here, and if I ever see your ugly face again, I'm gonna bust it, you got that?" He prodded Shayne's chest for emphasis.

Shayne was trying to keep a tight rein on his temper, but it was beginning to slip loose. He said, "Don't you ever get tired of living the life of a stereotype?"

"What you say?" Poppa Bear frowned fiercely.

"I thought so," Shayne sighed. He brushed the pimp's arm aside roughly.

Poppa Bear's face twisted in a snarl. He threw a punch at Shayne's face, but the big redhead blocked it easily and stepped in with a flurry of blows of his own. They pounded into Poppa Bear's torso, leaving the man gasping for breath. Shayne brought his right fist around and slammed it into Poppa Bear's jaw, sending the pimp sprawling to the asphalt.

Poppa Bear rolled over when he landed, gave a moan, and sat up, rubbing his jaw. There was fire in his eyes as he glared up at Shayne. He tried to get up and couldn't find his balance.

"You maybe won the first two rounds, sucker," he hissed at Shayne, "but next time around I'm gonna kill you!"

VI

SHAYNE WAS TIRED WHEN HE GOT BACK TO HIS APARTMENT. It had been a long day since he had come into his office that morning and found the Reverends McCoy and White waiting for him. A long and frustrating day, as a matter of fact. He felt like he was no closer to the killer of Mary McCoy than when he had started.

He had left the apartment complex with Poppa Bear still mouthing threats at him. After decking the pimp, he had looked over to see Terry Denton glaring at him, and then she had turned and angrily walked on into the building. Shayne was sure he had made no friends there.

Driving back across the Bay to his apartment, he thought about what

he had learned. He hadn't expected to find that Mary Ann McCoy was only the latest in a series of slayings. He reflected grimly that such serial killers were becoming all too common. And such disturbed individuals were sometimes very hard to catch, since no one could predict what their warped minds would have them do next.

The Stalker changed the complexion of the case. No longer could he concentrate strictly on Mary Ann. She was now only a part of the pattern, rather than the whole thing. A thought occurred to him and sent his fingers up to tug on his earlobe. Terry Denton had talked like all the victims were part of the same circle of hookers. Poppa Bear might well have known all of them. And Shayne had ample evidence that the man had a violent temper . . .

A bad temper was a far cry from a homicidal psychosis, Shayne knew, but it was something to keep in mind. Although he couldn't see any reason why Poppa Bear would try to harm his source of income, Shayne was also aware that sometimes murder knew no reason.

Those were the thoughts running through his head as he put the Buick away in the basement parking garage of his apartment house, rode the elevator up to the second floor, and walked down the hall to his apartment door. The window at the end of the hall looked out over the Miami River across the street, but Shayne wasn't paying any attention to the view as he keyed his door open.

Stepping into the apartment, Shayne reached for the light switch. His hand didn't get there . . .

SOMETHING SLAMMED INTO THE BACK OF HIS HEAD, sending a shower of sparks cascading in front of his eyes. He felt himself slumping, but a fist drove into his midsection, stopping his fall with a jolt. He tried to grab for his gun. Arms wrapped themselves around him, tying up his arms. Someone hit him in the stomach again.

Shayne felt himself starting to lose consciousness, and he fought against it. He lashed out into the shadows with a foot. It didn't connect with anything, but the move seemed to throw his captor off balance. They both started to fall.

Shayne tore loose from the grip as they fell, but more assailants were coming out of the darkness at him, swarming over him with fists and feet. There was no way he could stand up to the attack, and within seconds, they had him gripped solidly in several pairs of strong arms. Someone else whipped cord around his wrists and ankles and trussed him like a pig. A rag was stuffed in his mouth.

Shayne never actually lost consciousness, but he was hazy as they picked him up and carried him down the service stairs and out the back

entrance of the apartment hotel. It was late enough that no one was around to see the procession.

There were four men, as far as Shayne could tell. They put him in the back seat of a car parked in an alley, and two of them joined him there, one on each side. The other two got in front, and one of them started the car. Shayne was tied so tightly that he couldn't move, and the rag in his mouth was an effective gag. It was as neat a snatch job as he had ever seen.

They hadn't blindfolded him, and as the car passed underneath a streetlight, Shayne got his first good look at his captors. The man on his right looked familiar, as did the driver. Shayne realized suddenly that they were the men he had spotted earlier at Reverend McCoy's hotel. The one next to him had been the one who followed him, the driver the one who had stayed at the hotel. The other two men were strangers to him, but there was something about all four of them that identified them for Shayne. He knew right away that they were hired muscle, and that they were good at their job.

He couldn't put up any kind of a fight tied up like this, so all he could do was sit back and see where they were taking him. They had to have something more in mind than just killing him. If that was all they wanted, they could have done that back at the apartment, quickly and silently.

None of the men spoke. Their attack had been so well-coordinated that it seemed they had no need for communication. The big car purred smoothly over the causeway to Miami Beach, then turned northwards. Shayne assumed that they were headed for the exclusive residential area, Bal Harbour, and he saw a few minutes later that he was right.

The driver turned down a street lined with hedges and palms and huge green lawns. Behind the lawns were equally huge houses, most of them in the mansion category. They passed an especially high hedge, then turned into the asphalt driveway at the end of it.

The circular drive curved up in front of the house behind the hedge, stopping under an ornate porte-cochere. The men got out, still without speaking, and hauled Shayne out with them. There were no outside lights on, but Shayne saw that most of the windows in the house were ablaze with light.

One of the men opened the double doors of the entrance, and the others marched Shayne into the house. They took him down a long hall, through another pair of doors, and into a den that was panelled in rich woods, with high-piled carpet on the floor. The aromatic scent of expensive cigar smoke filled the air of the room. A man was standing at one of the windows, his back to the room.

The men pulled Shayne over to a deep armchair, then three of them held him again while the other one cut the bonds and yanked the gag from his mouth. Strong hands pushed down suddenly, and Shayne found himself sitting in the armchair. The men retreated.

THE MAN AT THE WINDOW SWUNG AROUND ABRUPTLY and strode over to the chair. He said, "Mr. Shayne. I'm sorry about my methods, but I wanted to be sure I got a chance to talk to you tonight."

It was all Shayne could do to keep his rage under control. He stared up at the man and demanded, "Who the hell are you?"

"You've never seen me before?" the man asked. "You have no idea who I am?"

"None at all," Shayne gritted. "But I don't like you anyway."

The man smiled slightly. "I'm glad to know that such a knowledgeable person as yourself doesn't know me. That means my people are doing their jobs well. And like I said a moment ago, I am sorry about my methods. My name is Leonard Pennell."

Shayne knew the name, and he frowned involuntarily. Pennell went on, "Ah, I see you have heard of me. That's good. You know that I mean business when I speak."

Shayne had heard of Pennell, all right, but it was all rumors. It was said that Leonard Pennell occupied a special position in the world of organized crime. He was a liaison man, a dealer in favors and influence. If there was a deal to be made between the Mob and a powerful businessman or politician, it was Leonard Pennell who handled all the details. His circle of operations supposedly extended throughout the country.

"Yeah," Shayne said slowly. "I know who you are. But I don't know why you had me grabbed. What am I to you?"

Pennell smiled that tiny smile again. He was a man of medium height, in his early fifties perhaps, with a full head of graying hair and a neat moustache. In a pair of slacks and a sweater, he looked more like a successful doctor or lawyer than a high-level criminal administrator.

"To a lot of my colleagues," he said, "you're a man they'd like to see dead, Mr. Shayne. But to me, you're a man who could prove to be extremely useful. I bear you no malice for all the plans you've ruined for my friends and associates. That wouldn't be expedient."

"Stop talking around it," Shayne growled. "Tell me what you want, and why you've had your boys tailing me today. Or I should say, trying to tail me."

Shayne heard a rustle of movement behind him, and Pennell looked

up sharply, his gaze putting a halt to whatever was going on. Shayne didn't feel nearly as hardbitten as he sounded, since he was still a little woozy from the beating the four men had given him, but confidence was the only way to deal with people like Pennell. They could respect that.

"I had you brought here tonight so that we could discuss your current case, Mr. Shayne," Pennell said. "I have a certain interest in it. That's why my men were watching Reverend McCoy's hotel. They saw that you were visiting the Reverend, and when they reported that fact to me, I told them to split up and keep an eye on you as well."

"What's your interest in Mary Ann McCoy? She was just a cheap hooker." Shayne's voice was purposefully harsh, hoping to provoke an unguarded response from Pennell. He was on dangerous ground, he knew it, but he wouldn't be out of danger as long as he was in this big house.

He got part of the response he was looking for. Pennell's eyes narrowed and his jaw tightened, but none of that showed in his voice. "I was acquainted with the girl," he said smoothly. "I'd like to see her murderer brought to justice."

"Don't you have faith in Peter Painter's crack police force?"

Pennell chuckled. "I'm afraid there's more to it than that, Mr. Shayne. Mary Ann McCoy was here, in this house, several days ago — "

"For professional reasons?"

Pennell's face hardened even more. He paused a moment before answering, then said, "That doesn't concern you. What does is that after she left, I noticed that a certain item was missing. No one but her had the opportunity to take it. I gave instructions to some of my people that they were to recover the item, but before suitable circumstances presented themselves, Mary Ann met with her accident. The missing item has still not been recovered."

"Are you going to tell me what it is?" Shayne asked. "Or am I supposed to guess."

"Is it important for you to know what it is?"

"It is if you want me to get it back for you." Shayne stood up slowly. He had had enough of looking up to Pennell. The four flunkies who had grabbed him stirred at his action, but Pennell waved them off.

"You're sure that's why I brought you here?" Pennell asked.

"That's all I can figure. Mary Ann lifted something she shouldn't have, something incriminating, probably, maybe an account book, tape recording, something like that. Am I right?"

"You could be," Pennell allowed.

"And you think that if I happen to come across it during my investigation, I'll turn it over to you, just like that?"

"It's something to keep in mind. *Have* you come any closer than the police to the killer?"

"That's something between me and my client," Shayne declared. So far, Pennell hadn't mentioned anything about the self-styled Stalker. It could be that he didn't know anything about that angle of the case.

Pennell nodded. "I can respect your feelings, Shayne, but you know I have to have that item back. It wouldn't be smart to attempt to do anything else with it."

"You seem sure I'll find it."

"You have a reputation as a man who finds what he's looking for. That's why I thought we should each know where we stand. Do I make myself clear?"

"I understand," Shayne said. "You're being very suave and urbane about it, but what you're really saying is that I'd better cooperate, or your boys will hand me my head."

"Something like that."

"What if I don't take you seriously? What if I go to the cops right now and tell them what you've already pulled tonight?"

Pennell shook his head. "Mr. Shayne, Mr. Shayne . . . You don't understand after all. I'm not even here. I'm having a late dinner right now with two of our city officials. And as far as a reason for you to take me seriously goes . . ." He let his voice trail off, but he nodded savagely to his men.

Shayne whirled to meet their rush, blocking a punch and throwing one of his own. He ducked a whistling left, straightened and snapped a blow at a convenient chin.

There was no way he could stand off all four of them, he knew that, but if he could get his hands on Pennell, he would have a lever for some bargaining . . .

He turned and lunged at Pennell, but the man wasn't there anymore. He had dodged back, out of Shayne's reach. Shayne knew right then and there that the night was going to get even worse.

They closed in on him, gradually beating him down, and one of the last things he heard before he passed out was Pennell saying calmly, "I think now that you'll take me seriously, Mr. Shayne . . ."

VII

THIS WASN'T THE FIRST TIME Shayne had been knocked out

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during his career as a private detective, but there was a difference. Usually when he came to, he was in a worse situation than he had been in before. Not this time; this time he thought he must be dreaming.

He was lying between clean, crisp sheets. He could tell that before he even opened his eyes. A comfortable pillow was under his head, and he didn't feel too bad, considering what he had gone through. As he shifted slightly, he could feel a few aches and pains around his body, but that was to be expected after the beating he had taken.

There was light in the room, and it was warm. Shayne slit his eyes, trying to look out through as small an opening as possible. What he saw made him open them wider and sit up in bed abruptly.

Sunlight was washing in through a window. Shayne knew where he was right away. He should have — he was in the bedroom of his own apartment.

He threw the sheet off and stood up. He was wearing his shorts, and he could see the bruises starting to come out of his body. Stalking across the room, he threw open the door into the living room. There was no one in sight, and a quick check of the apartment told him that it was deserted except for him.

Shayne stood in the middle of the living room and looked around bleakly, then slammed his right fist into the palm of his left hand. "Dammit!" he exclaimed between gritted teeth. Pennell's men must have brought him back here and put him to bed like a little kid. The arrogance of it! Pennell didn't consider him a threat, just a pest.

Pennell would see that some pests can be pretty dangerous, Shayne vowed.

A HOT SHOWER AND SEVERAL CUPS OF COFFEE with liberal dollops of cognac in them made him feel considerably better. A pile of scrambled eggs, sausage, and toast helped even more. By the time Shayne was dressed in fresh clothes and ready to go out, the clock on the kitchen wall said it was after ten o'clock. Lucy would be wondering where he was.

He stopped in the living room beside the telephone table, picked up the instrument, and dialed the office number rapidly. Lucy answered on the first ring.

"It's me, Angel," Shayne said. "I wanted to let you know I won't be in for a while."

"Has something happened, Michael? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. There's been a new development in the case, though." He filled her in quickly on what had happened the night before, glossing over most of the unpleasantness in an effort to keep her from

worrying. The revelation that Terry Denton was an undercover police-woman and that a powerful Mob figure like Leonard Pennell was interested in the case prompted surprise reactions from her.

"I remember Captain Denton," she said, and Shayne could hear the shudder in her voice. "He really had it in for you, Michael. I'm not surprised his niece doesn't like you."

"Neither am I, Angel. Of course, being related to Denton would be enough to sour anybody."

"How do you think Pennell figures in the killing?"

Shayne leaned a hip on the telephone table gingerly and lit a cigarette before replying. "I don't think he had anything to do with the actual killing," he said. "He was probably one of Mary Ann's customers, and she stole something from him while she was at his house. I don't know what it is, but it's something important to him. If he had killed her, though, he probably would have recovered the item, whatever it is, then, and he wouldn't be hassling me now. I've been doing some thinking about it, though, and I think whatever it was she stole may be the key to her murder."

"Why do you think that?"

"Pennell has a lot of contacts with influential people all over, people who are in the Mob's pocket even though nothing can be proven against them. It makes sense to me that Pennell would have some sort of record of these contacts. If he had something to prove their involvement with the Mob, it would certainly help to keep them in line. I'm talking about politicians, mostly, judges and senators and the like. They couldn't afford a hint of scandal, so once Pennell had them in his pocket, they would have to stay there or have their corruption exposed."

Putting it in words like that helped Shayne arrange the facts in his own mind. And Lucy was a good, intelligent listener. He continued to bounce his theory off her. "If Mary Ann got hold of that evidence, she may have put the bite on one of the people involved, and that person could be responsible for her death. It may not have anything at all to do with that Stalker business."

"You think it's just a coincidence, Michael?"

"I think it's possible," he said. "I'm going to see Terry Denton and find out if the cops have any idea of Pennell's involvement in the case. They could have been holding out on me. Painter sure wouldn't go out of his way to help me."

"Be careful, Michael. This Pennell sounds like a dangerous man."

"He is. But I can be, too."

Shayne told her again not to expect him until later in the day, then

hung up and left the apartment. It was a beautiful spring day in Miami, the kind of day that Shayne would have rather spent out on the water, deep-sea fishing, but business had to come first, especially when that business was murder.

THERE WAS ANOTHER IDEA FLOATING AROUND in Shayne's head as he drove toward Miami Beach, another possible explanation for the deaths of Mary Ann and the other girls, but it was from so far out in left field that he had hesitated to voice it to Lucy.

Terry Denton had told him that this 'Stalker character was on a crusade to wipe out evil. The connection hadn't struck him at first, but Jeremiah McCoy was bent on the same thing. The question was, would the evangelist be fanatical enough to kill, especially to kill his own niece? It was a hard notion to swallow, but Shayne knew that down through the ages, a lot of violence had been done in the name of decency and religion.

The apartment complex seemed dormant and sleepy when Shayne got there, which wasn't surprising. Evidently many of the residents were prostitutes, and most of their work was done at night. There would be a lot of late sleepers.

Shayne had neglected to get the number of Terry Denton's apartment, but the row of mailboxes inside the courtyard gave it to him. It was on the bottom floor, about halfway down the courtyard, and he headed in that direction at a quick walk.

He had stopped in front of the door and raised his hand to rap on it, when he heard a sound inside that made him pause. It was a muffled crack, and there was something about it that Shayne didn't like at all. He leaned toward the door and listened closer.

Another sound came to his ears, and he liked it even less. It was a low, soft cry, the noise someone in pain might make on the point of exhaustion.

A deep voice rumbled some words inside the apartment. There was a window a few feet from the door, but the curtains inside were drawn over it, blocking any view inside. Shayne stiffened as he heard the first sound repeated. He recognized it for what it was now, a slap.

Shayne didn't know what was going on in there, but he was sure as hell going to find out. Reaching inside his coat, he slipped his pistol from its holster, then lifted one of his big feet. He lunged forward.

The lock on the door wasn't a good one. It snapped as Shayne's foot crashed into it, and the door flew open. He followed it in with a rush.

His keen gray eyes took in the scene inside in a split second. Terry Denton was in a straight-backed chair in the middle of the living room

floor, her arms and legs bound to it with ropes. The dress she had worn the night before was still on her, but it was in tatters now. The face she turned toward Shayne was bruised and bloated.

Poppa Bear had been standing over her, a broad leather belt in his hands, and now he swung around rapidly as Shayne burst into the room. He cursed savagely, and his hand darted inside his coat. There was a flicker of movement. The hand came out holding a wicked-looking switchblade.

Shayne leveled the gun at him and barked, "Drop it!"

Poppa Bear moved faster than Shayne had ever seen him move before. The belt in his hand whipped out at Shayne's face, and when the big detective ducked it involuntarily, the belt suddenly lashed at his arm. Poppa Bear gave it a violent jerk, and Shayne's gun popped free. The pimp dropped the belt and lunged at Shayne with a fierce cry.

Shayne saw the blade coming at his eyes. He threw a hand up, felt cold fire draw a line across the back of his wrist. A lunge of his own brought him close enough to Poppa Bear to swing his other hand in a short arc. The fist drove into the pimp's stomach.

Poppa Bear slashed at Shayne with the knife again. Shayne blocked the move with his arm, catching Poppa Bear's forearm this time and not feeling the sting of the knife again. Shayne's fingers clamped down on the pimp's wrist and jerked him even closer. Shayne hit him in the belly again, then swung him in a circle. Poppa Bear smashed into the wall when Shayne let go, and the knife fell to the floor. Poppa Bear dived for it.

Shayne's foot came up off the floor in a perfectly timed move and caught the diving Poppa Bear in the jaw. The force of the kick lifted the man back up, almost flipping him over. He landed on the floor with a crash and laid there unmoving, completely out.

SHAYNE SWUNG AROUND TOWARD TERRY DENTON. She looked up at him and smiled weakly, then said, "I think you broke his jaw. I thought I heard it crunch." Her voice was a pained rasp.

"I can't think of anybody who deserves it more," Shayne grunted as he scooped up the switchblade from the floor and used it to slash the bonds holding Terry to the chair. Once they were cut, she slumped forward and probably would have fallen had Shayne not caught her. He held her and said, "What happened?"

Terry took a ragged breath. "He came in here after you left last night and started badgering me, wanting to know who you were and what you were after. I tried to play dumb. He wanted his money for my

night's work, and he grabbed my purse before I could stop him."

"Don't tell me you had your police ID in there?"

Terry shook her head. "No ID, but he did see my gun. That just made him more suspicious. He said it was a cop gun. I tried to tell him that I had gotten it from a cop who was one of my tricks, for protection while I was on the streets, but he never did believe me. He started beating up on me. I tried to fight back, but . . . he was just too strong. He tied me to that chair and said he was going to beat a confession out of me. He was sure I was a cop, and he was going to kill me, as an example to the other girls. He had to have his . . . fun . . . first, though, and that meant beating me all night."

"Good Lord," Shayne breathed.

"I'm telling you, Shayne, that was the longest night of my life. I've got to get out . . . get out of this business." A grim smile curved Terry's lips. "Nobody ever looked so good to me as you did when you came busting in the door."

Some of her strength seemed to be coming back. She was able to sit up in the chair by herself while Shayne went to the phone and called for the police and an ambulance.

Terry said, "Did you have to do that? Now all the girls will find out about me."

"They would have anyway," Shayne replied. "Once Poppa Bear got suspicious, your cover was blown. This assignment is over for you, Terry."

"Painter decides that, not you, Shayne," she flared, and Shayne was glad to see some fire in her eyes again. He was just starting to smile a little bit when Terry paled and started to slip off the chair again.

Shayne leaped forward, caught her again, and hefted her trim form in his arms. He placed her on a sofa, sat down beside her, and together they waited for help to arrive.

VIII

IT WAS EARLY AFTERNOON BEFORE THE SITUATION at the apartments was squared away. Poppa Bear had been placed in an ambulance and taken to the hospital with a severe compound fracture of the jaw. Several officers had accompanied him, since he was officially under arrest for attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, and assault on a police officer.

The ambulance crew wanted to take Terry with them, too, but she steadfastly refused. Shayne's influence didn't help, either. She let the

medicos clean up her wounds and give her a shot to help with the pain, but she was determined not to go to the hospital.

Shayne waited in the living room while she went into the bedroom and changed clothes. She emerged a few minutes later in a pair of jeans and a pullover, and except for the bruises on her face and a certain puffiness around her eyes, she looked like she was back to normal.

"You really shouldn't be here," Shayne said, not for the first time.

"This is still my case, too," Terry declared. "And it's not over yet, even though my cover is blown."

Shayne had found a bottle of cognac in the kitchen cabinet, and he poured two tumblers full now, handing one of them to Terry. "Martell," he commented. "It looks like we have something in common after all."

Terry took a healthy bite of the drink. "Maybe. I guess it's part of coming from New Orleans. I appreciate good cognac."

Shayne sipped the brandy and said, "Have you ever considered the fact that Poppa Bear might have something to do with the killings?"

"He's not the type who would write letters and call himself the Stalker," Terry said, "but we considered him. He knew all the murdered girls, so that automatically made him a suspect. Wait a minute."

Terry went back into the bedroom and came out a moment later holding a manila file. She handed it to Shayne and said, "That's what we came up with on Purvis Washington, also known as Poppa Bear. You can check the dates of the killings."

Shayne scanned the information in the file, then said, "He's got alibis for some of the killings."

"Including me. I was with him one of the times when a girl was being killed. If we assume one killer, that lets him out. We never could find a motive for him, anyway."

"So he's just a would-be murderer and not our man. Where does that leave us?"

Terry drank more of the Martell, then frowned at Shayne and said, "You're talking like we're working on this together."

"Well aren't we? We've both got too big a stake in it now to give it up, so we might as well cooperate."

She glared at him. "I'm the one who got beaten up. What stake do you have in it, other than a fee from your client?"

Shayne pointed at his own face. "If you look close, you'll see some bruises here, too. I've got some others that are more visible, but they won't be as easy to show you. Still, if you insist —"

"Forget it," Terry said hastily. "Maybe we can work together, if

you promise not to tell Chief Painter about it. I don't think he'd understand."

"I won't tell Painter, you don't tell Uncle Dolph. What they don't know . . ."

Terry held out the empty tumbler. "Can I have some more of this?"

Shayne took the glass from her and shook his head. "You've had enough, especially on top of that shot the paramedic gave you. You can't be my partner if you're completely looped, now can you?"

Terry looked at him quizzically. "Who gave you your bruises? They look recent."

"They are; I got them last night. And it just so happens that I know something about this case that you cops don't."

She came closer to him, and Shayne was aware that even in less-than-perfect condition, she was still a highly appealing woman. "So tell me," she said. "I've come clean with you."

Shayne explained quickly about being grabbed by Leonard Pennell's men and taken to see the underworld kingpin. He laid out his theories about what Mary Ann McCoy had stolen from Pennell, and Terry's frown deepened.

"Then we might have two different killers," she exclaimed when he was finished.

"It's a possibility," Shayne said. "And there's something else I've thought about. Do you know if Reverend McCoy had been down here to see Mary Ann lately?"

"I don't know, I wasn't around her that much. Of course, when I started this job here, I didn't know she was going to wind up one of the victims. I suppose we could ask Brenda. She lived next door to Mary Ann and was probably one of her best friends."

Shayne remembered that Brenda was one of the voluptuous brunettes he had seen with Terry the day before. He said, "Let's go ask her."

AS THEY WALKED ACROSS THE COURTYARD, TERRY ASKED,
"You don't think Reverend McCoy had anything to do with the killings, do you? What connection could he have?"

"He's dedicated to wiping out what he thinks is evil, just like the Stalker."

Astonishment washed over Terry's face. She said, "You mean to tell me that you think Mary Ann's own uncle could — "

"He's the man I'm working for," Shayne said, "but I've been hired by killers before. I've always found out about it, though, and if that's the case here, I damn sure want to know about it."

Shayne knocked on the door Terry pointed out to him, and it opened slightly a few seconds later. Brenda had evidently been awake and watching out her window. The chain was still on the door, and all Shayne could see of the brunette was her face as she peered out.

"What do you want?" Brenda spat at Terry. "I saw you with those cops. You're one of them!"

"That's right, I am a cop!" Terry retorted hotly. "But dammit, I'm just trying to find out who's been killing you girls. What's wrong with that?"

"You shouldn't have lied to us," Brenda sniffed angrily. "You must have thought we were really dumb. Well, what do you want now?"

"Did Mary Ann's uncle come to visit her not too long before she died?" Shayne put in.

Brenda looked at him and said, "You must be a cop, too."

"Private," Shayne said. "How about answering the question?"

Brenda shrugged. "I might as well. I don't know if he came down or not, but he was supposed to about a week ago. Mary Ann told me about it. She said she had to talk to him about some important things before her birthday. I think she was going to tell him about what she really did. She had never come right out and told him, even though a fool could see it."

"The two of you must have been good friends."

"Yeah, I'd say so. She wasn't the least bit snobbish, like you might think she'd be, with all her money and everything —"

"Wait a minute," Shayne said sharply. "Didn't she have to turn most of her money over to Poppa Bear?"

"Not that money," Brenda said with a wave of her hand through the partially open door. "She told me once she would inherit a lot more when she got older. She was just in this game for the fun of it. Lord, I don't know why she thought it was fun, but I guess it might be to a kid from the sticks who had had it up to here with religion."

Shayne and Terry looked at each other intently, and Terry shook her head, indicating to Shayne that she had known none of this.

"But you don't know whether or not Mary Ann saw her uncle last week?" Shayne asked Brenda.

"No, she never said anything more about it. And I don't like to pry."

Terry started to say something else, but Shayne put his hand on her arm and stopped her. He said, "Thanks, Brenda. You've been a big help."

"People usually pay me for helping them out," Brenda said pointedly.

Shayne took his wallet out and handed her a twenty dollar bill. "For

services rendered," he said, then steered Terry away from the door.

"You shouldn't have given her money," Terry said disapprovingly.

"It all goes on the expense account for this job," Shayne said, "And I'll see Reverend McCoy later to collect."

Terry shook her head. "I still think you're crazy. The Reverend wouldn't —"

"Do we know that?" Shayne cut in. "Do we know what the man is capable of? I think it's worth checking out. Are you coming along?"

"Coming along where?"

"To the *Daily News*. I want to learn a little more about SIN."

IX

THE LIBRARIAN AT THE *DAILY NEWS* MORGUE was an old lady who had been there for as long as Shayne could remember, and she knew just where to look for anything you could think of in the voluminous files. And she knew all about SIN.

"Reverend McCoy is a wonderful man," she told Shayne and Terry. "I listen to his radio show every day, and I watch his television program every Sunday. Of course, I don't agree with him all the time, but at least he's trying to do something about all the things that are wrong with the world."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "You think I could take a look at the file on him?"

"Of course, Mr. Shayne. And who's this lovely young lady?" she asked, smiling brightly at Terry.

"You're being kind," Terry said. "I know I look awful right now. But I'm Detective Theresa Denton, from the New Orleans Police Department, on special assignment to the Miami Beach force."

"You certainly don't look like a policewoman."

Chatting wasn't Shayne's strong point. He said, "How about that file?"

"Certainly, Mr. Shayne." The librarian pointed out its location to him, and he retrieved it from the file cabinet.

He and Terry took the file to a table and spread out its contents. Several minutes of intent, silent reading later, Shayne slapped his palm down on the table and said, "What did I tell you?"

"I still don't understand," Terry said, exasperation showing in her voice.

"McCoy built his organization up from nothing and nowhere in less than three years," Shayne explained. "He's on radio, on television, he has a weekly newsletter, he publishes his own books . . . Hell,

Terry, all that takes money, a lot of money. More than he could accumulate this fast."

"But don't people send him offerings and things?"

"Sure, but look at this. Less than six months after he founded the organization, his radio show was on eighty-five radio stations in this country, as well as several of the clear-channel, high-powered stations just across the border in Mexico. He went to that set-up from just one radio station in the northern part of the state, a 250-watt, daytime-only station. A move like that is impossible without a lot of capital, more than McCoy could have built up."

Terry put a finger on one of the other news stories, "But this says his brother was wealthy before he died. Maybe the brother financed the operation — "

"The brother died years before McCoy started up, back when he was just a country preacher. And, look at this." He showed her another clipping. "All of the brother's money was left to his daughter, to be held in trust for her by Jeremiah until the girl reached the age of twenty-one."

Terry looked at Shayne with understanding dawning in her eyes. "You think McCoy financed his sudden prominence with Mary Ann's money and then killed her to cover up the theft?"

"And to rid Miami Beach of a few hookers in the process," Shayne declared, his voice just as grim as his face. "It would make a good cover-up for his real motive, and do some good at the same time, the way his warped mind saw it."

The librarian had overheard most of this and was looking aghast at Shayne. Terry looked almost as dubious. "You've got no proof of any of this," she said.

"Then let's get some," Shayne said. "I'm going to see Reverend McCoy. Coming?"

"Damn right. I want to see you make a fool of yourself in front of your client."

"You look like you're feeling a little rocky."

"The shot and the booze are wearing off, that's all. Don't worry about me, shamus. I'll be all right."

Shayne shrugged and led the way out of the building. If she wanted to be tough, that was her business.

THEY CROSSED THE BAY AGAIN, HEADING FOR THE HOTEL where Reverend McCoy and Reverend White were staying in Miami Beach. Terry argued that Shayne had to be wrong, but he finally got her to admit that the facts fit and that they had no evidence to prove

anything to the contrary. "I'm not convinced," Terry said, but Shayne just raised a bushy red eyebrow and said, "I guess we'll see."

They arrived at the hotel and left the Buick at the curb. Shayne strode up to the desk in the lobby and said, "I want to see Reverend Jeremiah McCoy. He's still registered here, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk replied, "but you won't find him in his suite right now. He and the other minister went out a little while ago."

"Do you have any idea where they went?"

"I'm not sure. There's a little chapel down the street. I believe they went there yesterday afternoon. Reverend McCoy said he needed a peaceful place for some meditation and prayer."

"You think that's where they went?" Terry asked Shayne.

"It's worth a try," he said, striding out of the hotel with her right behind him.

The small chapel was a block and a half away. It was used for weddings most of the time, and an occasional memorial service was held there. Nondenominational, it sat behind a large parking lot, and its garish, ostentatious architecture fit right in here in Miami Beach.

There were two glass doors leading into the auditorium. Shayne opened one of them and slipped inside, Terry following him. It was hushed and quiet inside, due to the thick walls and the soft carpet underneath their feet. There were several rows of pews, with aisles on the side leading up to the podium pit altar up front. The lighting inside was dim and muted, despite the sunlight coming in through the glass entrance doors, and Shayne had to adjust for a moment to the shadowy silence before he spotted two kneeling figures in front of the altar.

"This is awful, Shayne," Terry whispered beside him. "It's almost . . . I don't know, sacrilegious."

"So is murder, the way I look at it," Shayne replied in a low voice.

McCoy had heard them come in, and now he looked over his shoulder at them. He got to his feet, and when White started to follow him, McCoy placed a hand on his shoulder. Shayne heard him say, "You go right ahead, Jared. I'll see what Mr. Shayne wants."

McCoy hurried down the aisle toward them, and when he reached them, he said, "What is it, Mr. Shayne? Have you found something out?"

"I'm afraid so," Shayne said. "Reverend McCoy, this is Detective Theresa Denton; I don't think you've met. Detective Denton was on an undercover assignment for the Miami Beach police."

McCoy looked puzzled, but he said, "How do you do, Detective? I'm glad to meet you."

"Terry was pretending to be a hooker," Shayne said bluntly. "She knew your niece."

McCoy looked startled at Shayne's words. He looked around quickly and said, "Please, Mr. Shayne, this isn't the proper place —"

"Would it be better to talk about it in that new headquarters and church your group just built? What do you finance projects with, Reverend?"

"I don't understand, Mr. Shayne. What does our new building have to do with Mary Ann's death? I don't think I like your tone."

Shayne ignored his comment and said harshly, "Did you visit your Mary Ann about a week ago?"

"I was supposed to go down and see her, but I had some business come up unexpectedly —"

"Something to do with money?"

McCoy shook his head. He looked like he was starting to get angry. "I don't handle the money matters, Mr. Shayne, I thought you knew that. Matters of the spirit are what I deal with."

"You don't even know how much money your group has?"

McCoy hesitated. "Perhaps I shouldn't admit it, but I've always been awful with money. That's why I'm so glad Jared came along to help me."

Terry's hand was on Shayne's arm, and her fingers tightened. He tensed, too, and they both looked over at Jared White. He was still kneeling, but the chapel was so hushed, he had probably heard every word that had been said. White's back was tense, and he was breathing deeply.

Slowly, Shayne asked McCoy, "Did White go to see Mary Ann last week when you couldn't?"

McCoy shook his head. "No, as far as I know, Jared hadn't seen for her about a month. But you can ask for yourself —"

He broke off and turned toward White. The younger evangelist was standing up now, and the look on his face caused McCoy to frown. "Why, Jared," he asked, "what's wrong?"

White was as pale as his name as he stood there, a Bible clutched in his hand. He was casting his eyes from side to side.

"The killings started about a month ago," Terry said softly. "And Mary Ann wanted to talk to Reverend McCoy last week, before her birthday."

"She would have been twenty-one next week," McCoy said, sorrow tinging his words. "Such a tragedy."

"Yeah," Shayne said, his face a tight mask. He started down the aisle toward White. "A real tragedy."

White looked like he wanted to break and run. Terry looked almost as grim as Shayne. And McCoy still looked confused.

"You're good with money, aren't you, White?" Shayne asked as he advanced on the man. "Good enough to siphon off a girl's inheritance to finance something you believed in so strongly, right?"

"Oh, now, Mr. Shayne, what are you saying?" McCoy demanded. "I won't have you accusing my friend and brother of something so horrible!"

"Embezzlement's not as horrible as murder," Shayne said. White flinched at the first word, flinched even more at the other. "Mary Ann found out about it and told you she knew a month ago, didn't she, White?"

The man finally found his voice and said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Shayne. Surely if you ask the Lord to help you, he can clear your mind — "

"Stop it!" Shayne grated. "You're not going to get out of it like that, White. You killed Mary Ann and those other girls — "

"No!" White cried out, his face twisted. "The Stalker did it! He killed them!"

Shayne stopped short. "Now that's interesting," he said softly. "I'm glad you said that . . . since the only ones who know about those notes are the police and the man who wrote them."

WHITE CAUGHT HIS BREATH, REALIZING HIS OWN WORDS had trapped him. "Th—that's not true," he stammered, holding up the Bible as if it would protect him from Shayne's frosty gaze. "I heard it somewhere — "

Shayne's hand lashed out, slapping the Bible aside and grabbing White's collar. He jerked the man forward, and the Bible fell to the floor.

"You're one of the worst I'm seen," Shayne growled, "hiding behind that piousness — "

"Shayne," Terry interrupted him, and he could hear the urgency in her voice. He turned his head, retaining his grip on White, and saw that while McCoy was standing there looking stunned by the sudden revelation, Terry was looking at something on the floor.

Shayne followed her gaze and looked down. The Bible was lying open on the floor, and they could all see the hiding place that had been cut into it. Lying beside the Bible where they had fallen from the hiding place were two cassette tapes, tied together with string.

"That'll do it," Shayne breathed. "The last piece of evidence we need to convince you, White. Mary Ann stole those tapes with a little

blackmail in mind, and you must have adopted the idea when you listened to them and realized what you had."

Tears were rolling down White's cheeks now, and he shook his head violently. "I didn't mean to hurt anybody!" he cried. "I just wanted to put the money to good use! But Mary Ann wouldn't see it that way. She was blind to the light! She should have understood —"

"Demon!" McCoy hissed, advancing on the hapless man in Shayne's grasp. "You — you evil thing!"

"No, Jeremiah!" White protested. "You have to understand, you of all people! Those girls weren't important, they were just sluts. Filth! The kind of thing we've dedicated our lives to fighting! We're important, you and I and our work —"

An inarticulate cry of rage and pain escaped McCoy's lips as he threw himself at White. Shayne released his grip to get between the two evangelists —

And White moved, faster than anyone could have expected.

He hit Shayne from behind, clubbing his hands together and smashing them into the back of Shayne's neck. Shayne staggered but didn't go down. McCoy reached for White, but the younger man clipped him with a quick punch. McCoy went to his knees.

Terry was snatching her gun from her purse, but Shayne yelled, "No!" as the weapon came free. He pivoted and ducked under a punch that White threw. Shayne's fists were clenched, and he shook off the effects of the blow to his neck. His bony right fist started climbing almost from the floor.

The crack it made as it smashed into White's jaw resounded through the quiet chapel. White's head snapped back, his eyes rolled up, and he went backwards into the podium. He folded up on the floor then, and Shayne rubbed knuckles that would be swollen later.

He scooped the tapes from the floor, leaving the Bible where it was. McCoy was staring down at White, and Shayne knew that the evangelist had just learned how to hate things besides the immorality of the modern world. Terry Denton looked tired and worn and still tense, with the pistol still in her hand.

Shayne headed down the aisle toward Terry and said, "Let's find a phone and get this cleared up. I could do with a little rest."

"So could I," she said. "Come on . . . partner."

Shayne was starting to grin as they stepped through the glass doors of the chapel.

He stopped when he saw who was waiting outside.

the same big black car that Shayne had been carried off in the night before. Pennell gestured at the tapes in Shayne's hands and said, "You see, I was right to have confidence in you, Mr. Shayne. I'll take those now."

Shayne shook his head. "I don't think so. I think I'd like to listen to them and see just who your friends are. And I'm sure the cops will be interested."

Pennell looked sad. "I'm really sorry to hear you say that, Mr. Shayne. This isn't a good setting for violence."

Shayne wasn't going to stand around trading words. He reached out and thrust Terry behind him, back through the doors. As Pennell barked a command at his men, Shayne dove back into the chapel after her.

Terry had her gun out again, and so did Shayne. They ran down the aisle toward the front, where McCoy watched them in confusion. Shayne snapped, "Is there a back way out of here?"

"I — I don't know," McCoy faltered. "I'm not familiar with this place — "

Pennell's men burst into the chapel, guns drawn. Shayne turned and sent a slug screaming into their midst. He saw a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye, but he didn't recognize it until it was too late.

White had come to and climbed to his feet without anyone noticing, and now he barreling into Shayne and grabbed the tapes out of the big detective's hands. He slammed an elbow into Shayne's ribs, knocking him aside, and ran down the aisle toward Pennell and his men.

"Here they are!" he yelled, brandishing the tapes. "You can have them, if you'll just help me get away!"

Pennell nodded to his men.

They all fired at once. The bullets ripped into White and threw him backwards as though he had run into a stone wall. The tapes fell from his hand and landed on the carpet of the aisle beside him.

Shayne grabbed McCoy, who seemed dazed by all this, and threw him down behind a pew. Crouched behind another one, Terry was snapping shots at Pennell and his men. Pennell was staying low, but his men were up and blazing away. Shayne found some cover for himself, little though it was, and joined Terry in returning the fire.

Shayne heard Pennell say sharply, "We've got to get those tapes and get out of here before the police arrive. Al, go get them!"

One of the men cast a glance at his boss, then shrugged and lunged up the aisle for the tapes. Shayne calmly drilled him in the shoulder,

knocking him down a good ten feet short of his goal.

THAT LEFT FOUR OF THEM, COUNTING PENNELL. Desperation was starting to show on the mobster's face. He had always protected his image, never allowing the police to come close to him, and he knew what a chance he was taking even being there. But those tapes were the power that had consolidated his position. He had to have them back.

Pennell sent another man up the aisle, and Terry winged him in the leg, dropping him before he had gone more than a few feet. The odds were closer to even now, and the battle was rapidly turning into a standoff.

And that was something Pennell couldn't afford. They could all hear the sirens coming closer, as the police sped to investigate a pitched battle in such an unlikely place as a chapel.

"Both of you go at once!" Pennell screamed at his men. "They can't get both of you!"

The men took off down the aisle, both of them firing as they came. Splinters from the pew flew around Shayne's head as slugs chewed it up. He held his breath and squeezed off the last three shots in his gun. Terry was going the same thing a few feet away.

Shayne heard her cry out. His bullets found their marks, smacking into the bodies of the two charging men. There hadn't been time for finesse. They fell with cries of agony, clutching at their bellies.

Pennell stood and sprinted toward the glass entrance doors, desperate now only to escape. Shayne glanced at Terry, saw her stretched out motionless in front of the altar, and yelled, "Pennell!"

Pennell stopped, hearing the death in Shayne's voice. He turned slowly. Shayne stood up and came down the aisle toward him, the gun as steady as a rock in his hand.

Only Pennell didn't know it was empty.

Shayne drew closer to him and said in a low voice, "Go ahead, run. I'd like that, Pennell."

"Wait a minute, Shayne," Pennell croaked. "We can make a deal — "

Shayne's face twisted. The gun lashed out, cracked against Pennell's skull. Pennell let out a groan and fell.

Shayne looked around grimly at the carnage. He started back up the aisle, stopped beside White's body and plucked the tapes from the blood that had spread to them from the evangelist's riddled form. McCoy had stood up, and he looked like he would never be the same again. Shayne couldn't blame him for that.

"Hey, Shayne . . ."

The weak voice galvanized Shayne. His head snapped around. Terry was up on one elbow, a hand on her other shoulder. Shayne saw blood on her fingers. "Flesh wound," she said, her voice cracking slightly with pain and weariness. "Now can you call an ambulance and get me to the hospital, okay?"

"Okay," Shayne said, and he grinned.

PETER PAINTER ARRIVED SOME FORTY MINUTES LATER, after Pennell and his men had been taken into custody. Terry had been rushed to the hospital, but the ambulance crew had assured Shayne that she would be all right. Jared White was headed for the morgue, and Shayne and Reverend McCoy were telling their story for what seemed like the hundredth time already.

Painter listened to the story, nodded intently. Shayne tried to ignore him, but Painter stepped up to him and said, "Well, it looks like that dumb Irish luck saved you again, Shayne."

Shayne looked the other way. Painter considered for a moment, then looked like he was about to choke. He said, "You did a good job, Shayne. Law enforcement agencies all over the country have been dying to get something on Pennell, not to mention getting the Stalker case cleared up."

A wide smile broke out on Shayne's face. "Praise from Peter Painter," he said unbelievingly. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"Just don't get used to it. Besides, I know you didn't do all of it yourself. Detective Denton helped you. She did an excellent job, in my opinion. That just makes me happier to tell you the news."

"News? About Terry?"

"I just saw her at the hospital. I've been short a detective since you cost me one on your last case, Shayne, but no more. Denton wants to work for me. She said she likes it here. *You* make things interesting, she says." Painter made a face again. "I thought that girl had enough sense to hate your guts."

Shayne's grin just got wider. Terry Denton on the force in Miami Beach? He wondered what Uncle Dolph would have to say about *that!*

NOTE: In the March 1981 issue of MSMM the printer inadvertently used an obsolete subscription form giving the old rates instead of the latest ones. Our apologies to anyone inconvenienced by this error.

Mike's Mail



THE WORST

Just to tell you that your magazine for January 1981 was the worst you have ever published. I sincerely hope that the rest of 1981 books are like the old ones. It is my favorite mystery book, so don't spoil it for me.

Mrs. L.E. Forrer
727 S. Walnut St.
Orrville, Ohio 44667

Well, of course, I'd rather receive letters saying, "Gosh, you're doing a great job, and MSMM is the greatest!" But that's not the way it goes all the time. If any of you readers have any complaints, I'd like to hear them, but it would help if you were more specific and tell me what in particular you didn't like. Personally and editorially, I thought the January issue was very good, with an excellent cover and a nice variety of entertaining stories and features. It's impossible to please a hundred thousand readers with everything in every issue. The best I can do is please most of you most of the time.

THE DOG DID IT

HELP! Please send me one December 1980 issue. I was in the middle of "All The Faces of Fear" and my dog chewed the bottom and the top of the whole magazine. I still have the middle and all the little pieces, but I don't want to put the magazine together a word at a time.

I am enclosing \$2.50 and hope that is enough over the \$1.50 for postage and handling.

I don't take it in the mail as I can buy it a week or two before it

Continued on page 75

He wore a fantastic robe that covered him from his neck to the ground. "Prospero!" I started to say. He didn't answer. He took a step backward — and disappeared!

ASSASSINATION

— MIDDLE EAST

by JOSEPH COMMINGS

I CLIMBED THE HILL TO THE HOUSE, LEAVING THE LIGHTS of old Istanbul down below. In my pocket were passports for Peter Geist and his wife. The Geists were West German emigres, living now in a sort of self-imposed exile in Turkey. Both had retired from the theatre, after long years on the stage, where Peter Geist had been most famous for his role of Prospero in *The Tempest*. I'd never seen either of them, except through passport photos, and I was now looking forward to my official visit with a relish beyond the call of my job at the American Consulate.

It was a large, square bandbox of a house, badly needing a coat of paint. In the night wind from the Bosphorus, the panes of the windows rattled loosely. I went through an entrance in a crumbling wall, into a courtyard. In the moonlight the green pebble pathway underfoot looked pale and luminous. The shadows from the scrubby palms sprawled like gigantic tarantulas. Shadows splashed the doorway of the house.

And in the black arch of the doorway stood a man.

I paused, with about twenty-five feet separating us. I recognized the face of Peter Geist at once, from his passport photo — hollow-eyed and hollow-cheeked, with a vaulting dome of a bald head. There was a thin jut of nose over the full lips. His hands were in white gloves, clasped solemnly in front of him. What made me pause was that he was in a fantastic robe that covered him from his neck to the ground, concealing even his shoes.

“Prospero!” I started to say. The Shakespearean image sprang immediately into my mind.

He didn’t answer. He took a step backward, the shadows on him wavering, and he disappeared in the doorway.

After a moment I uprooted myself and went on to the door. It was standing wide open, a black hallway beyond.

Close in front of me a white figure emerged. It was a woman, in a white dress.

“Hello!” I said, a bit startled. “My name is Norman Cross and I’m from the American Consulate. I have your passports with the visas.”

“Thank you,” she said in a heavy tone. “I’m Frau Geist. I’ll take them.”

“One moment,” I said. “Here’s yours. It’s all in order. So’s your husband’s. But through an oversight, he forgot to sign his application. I’ve got to have his signature before I can turn over his passport.”

“Leave it with me,” she said. “I’ll have him sign it and return it to you in the morning.”

“Why not have him sign it now, Mrs. Geist? It’ll only take a moment. He’s here, isn’t he? I just saw him.”

She was still in the dark, looking out at me. “Yes,” she said. “He passed me in the hallway. Come in.”

I FOLLOWED HER FLITTING FIGURE IN THE DARK. The passage-way was narrow, so narrow that my shoulders kept brushing the smooth walls. The rooms led straight back, after the manner of a railroad flat, or as they call them in Southern United States, a shotgun house.

At the end of the passage she opened a door into a lighted room. I glanced quickly from her to the stuffed furniture and to the pile of strapped luggage on the center rug.

She was tall and big-boned. Her once flaxen hair was now faded and streaked with grey and it was pulled to the back of her head in a hausfrau’s coronet. When she had been a German cinema star her name had been Arla Pokorny. Later when the beauty started to fade, she became a character actress. She must have had precious memories

of Fritz Lang and Conrad Veidt and Emil Jannings. Offstage, I found her to be a silent woman who said more with a look than a spoken word.

She had over her arm a large bag to hold her knitting. It had wooden handles on it.

I glanced back at the luggage. "You're all packed."

"Ja. We're leaving by plane tomorrow afternoon."

"Where's Mr. Geist?"

Arla glanced sideways. This room was shut off from the rest of the house by a curtain of beaded strands. As I followed her gaze, I saw the beaded curtain tremble apprehensively as if moved by an unseen presence.

She strode to the curtain and parted it, the beads whispering glassily.

This second room was also lighted. The furniture, polished to a high gloss, was ponderous. A door stopper was a pedestal covered with red velour on which stood a life-size wooden gnome. Two griffon heads composed the back of the chair. A tapering clock with a quaint face, such as those that tick away the hours in the corners of mosques, had stopped with both hands pointing upward on twelve. Midnight?

This, I felt instantly, was Prospero's room.

But there wasn't a soul in it.

"Peter!" she called. There was no answer anywhere.

"Did he go in there?" I asked, nodding at the door with the gnome stopper.

She did more than answer. She showed me. There was a small bedroom, then a kitchen and bathroom. There was no back door, and when I finally turned my attention to the windows, I found them all covered with an iron grillework.

We both returned to Prospero's room.

"He isn't here," said Arla.

"But both of us saw him," I argued.

Almost audibly I could hear him sardonically reciting the lines: "*... melted into air, into thin air... We are such stuff as dreams are made on...*"

"He will return," she was saying. She seemed to be no more concerned over his mysterious disappearance than if he had gone down to the corner for a loaf of pumpernickel. "If you will kindly leave the passport and the application, he will sign it, and — "

"No," I cut her short. If Prospero wanted to play childish tricks on me, I could be severe. "This is an important State Department matter." I laid it on heavy. "We have strict rules. Either I see him sign, or it's no passport."

Her face was stolid. "Very well," she said.

I told her to call me at the Consulate whenever Geist showed up. I gave her the phone number.

Irritated by the incident because I couldn't understand it, I walked back through the night, down the hill to the Consulate.

There all my petty peeves were shocked out of me. Tragedy had struck. During my absence the Consul-General had been shot dead by an Arab assassin.

THERE WAS NO DOUBT about who had done the shooting. There had been fifty witnesses.

The Consulate was buzzing. Everyone was grim-eyed. I peered into the big dining room. Someone said: "There's where it happened."

The tables were still laden with aspic, ices, cakes, caviar, champagne, and chicken dinners. The room had been cleared of guests and the Consul's body had already been removed.

Only two men remained at the banquet, standing between the long tables. One was an elderly ambassador with asthma who always talked as if someone were pinching his nostrils. The other one I recognized at once as United States Senator Brooks U. Banner.

Banner, looking down in the mouth, was gruffly questioning the ambassador. Big and fat, Banner's rainbarrel physique was draped in a suit of white Congo cloth that sagged and wrinkled like a pair of slept-in pajamas. He wore rope-soled boating shoes on his fiddle-sized feet. He was shaking his grizzled mane at the ambassador and making sea-lion noises. I managed to get past the military guard at the door and approached.

"Senator — " I began.

But already he had begun like a run-down phonograph record: "I'm on a junket, goddamit. I was invited to this dinner, but my plane got in too late." He scowled at me. "Who in blazes're you?"

"Norman Cross. I've been assigned here for the past month. I'm in the Foreign Service, but I'm not attached to any one consulate."

The ambassador edged in nasally. "Sort of an emissary-at-large."

"I go where there's trouble brewing," I said.

"Stick around," said Banner. "There's trouble. Plenty trouble. You heard what happened, didn't you? I never met the Consul, but I hear he was a good egg. He wasn't shot for anything personal. This's political murder." His ruddy jowls trembled with wrath. "I missed it. They tell me that the dinner'd just started when in walks this Hasaan — "

"Hajji Hasaan?" I said.

Banner pounced at me. "You know him?"

"I only saw him once. I heard he'd visited the Consul several times in the last few months. His papers were all in order. They seemed on friendly terms."

"Like I said," mumbled Banner, "it's political murder. What's *your* description of him, Cross?"

"He's a mulla. That's a Moslem versed in law and religion. He came from Saudi Arabia."

"What's he look like?"

"He has a round face, broad nose, and a scraggly white beard. He's above middle height and fat — "

Banner grimaced down at his own girth. "Not as big as me?"

"Hardly that," I said.

"Waal, sir," rumbled Banner, "this dinner tonight was for ambassadors, diplomats, VIPs, and their wives. Hasaan wasn't invited, but he got in the front door. Probably on the strength of his former friendly visits. He simply walked in here." Banner didn't consult any notes. He had it all in his big head. "He was wearing a tarboosh with a turban around it — "

I recalled the tarboosh, or fez, on Hajji Hasaan. It reminded me of a red flowerpot. I interrupted: "That showed that he'd made his hadj to Mecca. He was a holy man."

"Holy my fanny!" snarled Banner. "He walked straight up to where the Consul was sitting and said, *I am the sword-arm of Islam!* Only he had no sword. He had a revolver. He pulled it outta the folds of his burnous and fired four shots into his victim at very close range. None of 'em missed. Then in the ensuing panic he simply walked out again through those French doors and disappeared."

I felt my jaw tighten. "How'd he get away with it — in that crowd?"

Banner growled back. "How'd John Wilkes Booth get away with it when he shot Lincoln at Ford's Theatre? Y'unnerstand what this means? This could have grave consequences between the USA and the Arab world. It was no more'n a shooting like this that fired off World War I."

The ambassador had been busy snuffling. "You're right, Senator. They'll have to find Hajji Hasaan. And quickly."

"They're looking for him," promised Banner. A granite patience was graven on his grim face. "It's a sad mess, but I gotta clear it up before it gets outta hand. Cuz if I can't handle this on the spot, I got no right even *thinking* of running for President."

"President?" The ambassador sounded as if he were smothering. "You?" He had turned pale at such an appalling thought.

THE NEXT MORNING I FOUND BANNER in the breakfast nook. He was eating what he called friendly eggs — scrambled together. "Any news?" I asked.

He looked dismal. "Nothing new. They searched Hajji Hasaan's quarters. Of course he was gone. No telling where he is by now. Our State Department is saying that the Muzlems" — his way of pronouncing Moslems — "that the Muzlems'll have to turn in the assassin or be held accountable. It's in scareheads in all the morning papers. Gives me a shuddery feeling. This's building up to be a headache that all the bromo in the world won't cure."

"Senator," I said, "I'll take our mind off the problem by giving you a different one to solve."

"Whuzzat?"

"You're good at solving disappearances."

"Hajji Hasann's?"

"No. Peter Geist's."

"Huh? Didja say Geist?"

"Yes, Senator. Do you know him?"

"I never met him, but I always wanted to. One night in Berlin, between wars, I saw him perform marvelous magic in Reinhardt's great Schauspielhaus. Some of the nifties he pulled gave me a tough time figgering 'em out."

"I didn't know he was a magician."

"One of the greatest," said Banner with respect.

"Well, Senator, last night he staged a disappearing act — "

Banner suddenly chuckled. He was in his element. "He did, eh? Let's go and meet him."

THE COURTYARD WAS BRIGHTER IN THE MORNING SUNSHINE. The pebbled path was really green. Rosebushes were abloom against the grilled windows. The black paneled door was closed and as we stood before it I could see the reflection of my face, the lower half of it, at any rate, in the polished brass knocker.

Arla Geist opened the door.

"I am sorry," she said. "My husband has not yet returned."

"He'll have to show up soon," I said, "if he wants to make use of that passport."

She merely shrugged. She didn't look too worried.

I introduced her to Banner. He was wearing a panama, with the brim turned all the way down, that made him look like Charlie Chan. He doffed the panama with a sugary grin. And when he began to babble

about his long-time admiration of Peter Geist, Arla softened and invited us both in for coffee.

We went through the narrow passage, Banner squeezing his bulk along. Again I entered the first room where the airplane luggage was still piled.

Leaving us with a polite smile, Arla went all the way rearward to the kitchen.

"So," said Banner, "Geist fooled you in here last night." He looked inquisitively around the room. "He's an actor, magician, master mimic."

The windows were open and I could see the jewel-glow of the roses framed by the grilles outside. A soft rose-perfumed breeze came in and ruffled the beaded curtain that led to Prospero's room.

"Lemme get this straight, Cross. You *both* saw Geist. There may be a reason for one of you to lie, but not both. You said Geist had on white gloves and a robe. What kinda robe?"

"A magic robe. The kind with stars and crescents and planets on it. The kind he'd wear for his part in *The Tempest*."

"And he was sorta short and skinny."

"I noticed his shortness more than skinniness. The robe hid that."

"Yass, to be sure. He stands a good head shorter'n you. He wasn't the traditionally tall and majestic Prospero. I heard that he used to people his case with undersized players in order to appear tall by contrast. They called his troupe Geist's Midgets."

Restless, he reached out a hand to the tempting bead curtain. "Quick, Cross. Before she comes back. Let's take a gander into this next room."

I was all for it, for I thought that the secret of Geist's disappearance was in there.

There was a great jangle of glass beads as Banner plowed through. I followed.

"This furniturē," I said. My eyes were on the door stopper in the shape of a life-size gnome.

I took a step toward it.

The call to mid-morning prayer floated through the open window. Moslems pray five times a day. From a nearby mosque, with its squat minaret, came the muezzin's voice. His summons sounded faintly, seeming like a voice from another world, a disembodied voice. "La ilaha illa 'llah; muhammad rasulu 'llah!" (There is no God but Allah; Mohammad is the prophet of Allah!)

I said: "This furniture!"

Banner grinned. "You think that Geist, being small, hid himself in

one of these manlike figgers. Mebbeso. But even by looking at 'em I can tell this one's solid."

He gave the wooden gnome a sound kick and it rocked heavily on its pedestal.

"Not in there," he said. "Guess again, Cross."

"He went inside this house," I said grimly. "He never slipped by me in that crowded passage as I came in."

"No," said Banner. "No one got out past you." He pricked up his ears. "Jiggers! She's coming back!"

We swarmed back into the other room like a pair of guilty schoolboys. The glass-beaded curtain heaved in our wake.

Arla, tall and gaunt, came back with a tray of coffeecups. She said nothing about the suspiciously swaying curtains.

It proved to be a dull coffee break.

Once, I asked: "Suppose your husband doesn't show up in time?"

"Then I shall go alone." With her throaty voice and somber expression she reminded me of Garbo.

She sat there rebuking me silently for not giving up Geist's passport. Banner mooned at the ceiling, his mind full of international troubles. I was plain uncomfortable.

At last we left.

Banner said: "I'm gonna have lunch on the terrace of the Park Oteli. Keep me company, Cross."

As we started down the hill, toward the mud-pie domes of the mosques with their candlestick minarets and the countless red rooftops of Istanbul, walking under trees of Judea, Banner had one last word about the magician.

"Didja know that geist is German for ghost?"

ON THE WAY BANNER STOPPED OFF AT A KIOSK to phone the Consulate for any fresh news. He left the phone booth with his spirits dragging. He was as communicative as a grizzly with a toothache. I noticed that he even walked like a trained bear.

The terrace of the Park Oteli gave us one of the most exquisite views in the world and at noon the tables were not too crowded. We sat down at a table that had a centerpiece of Izmir figs and black olives.

I wanted to loosen Banner up with a drink, so I ordered *raki* for both of us. *Raki* was made of pure grape juice and it looked like water. But it was so potent that even Banner's conditioned gullet gagged on it as it went down in one gulp.

"Like it?" I asked, sipping more conservatively.

"Sall right," he coughed and sputtered. "But gimme good old

Haig & Haig or Old Smuggler's Rum. What'll we have to eat?"

"Shish kebab originated in Turkey," I reminded him.

I passed the order along to the patient waiter. "And *zerde pilaf*," I said. "That's a rice dish cooked with saffron; Senator. And yogurt."

"Yogurt?" said Banner with a grimmace. "I left America to get away from that faddist diet. What's wrong with being fat? It takes a lotta patient hours to develop a bucket like this."

"You'll like *this yogurt*," I insisted.

Banner gnawed on an unlit cigar and gazed out over the balustrade. Across the Bosphorus, Asia Minor crouched like a blond lion. The sunlight sparked on the blue water and on every kind of ship. It was difficult, on this spanking bright day, to think that there was any trouble anywhere in the world.

Then Banner's voice came through all my optimism like the crack of doom. "We're like a couplea toys playing on the railroad tracks with the Super-Chief due along any minute."

"It is bad," I was forced to admit.

"I'll give you the motive in one word," he said: "Dardanelles!"

He talked out so loud that I cringed to think of being overheard.

"Lower your voice, Senator," I warned softly. "There're spies — "

"Spies!" he boomed. "You think they don't know what's going on, pardner? Let's face it. The damage is done. Lemme show you." He shoved a space clear on the white tablecloth and began drawing jagged lines with a gory red crayon. "Pitchure," he said gravely, "pitchure Turkey as a *real* turkey!"

I strove to picture it.

His red crayon zigzagged. His hatching strokes were bringing forth a surrealistic fowl. "The main body is the large part of Asia Minor. They call it Anatolia." He droned on, regardless of whether I possessed any knowledge of the situation of not. He was telling me. "The head of the gobbler is this bit of European Turkey. And the neck — the neck is right where we're sitting. Like a couplea idiotic ducks. Right on the Bosphorus. There's the Dardanelles — and Gallipoli just below. And we're gonna get it right in the neck!" He jabbed the point of the crayon at my nose. "Turkey controls the Dardanelles. Russia wants 'em. Just like she wants the Suez and Panama Canals. It's that simple!"

"Yes," I said. "And Russia's trying to stir up trouble between us and the Arabs."

"You couldn't be righter," said Banner, flinging down the crayon. "They told me on the phone that the slugs found in the Consul's body

were 7.62-mm. gas-check cartridges. These're shot from a Russian Nagant. Hajji Hasaan used a Russian revolver. But that causes no surprise. Their policy all along has been to use other people as cat's paws. Letting other nations do the spadework for the grave they're digging for us. The Muzlems are over 300 million strong. If trouble starts here, the Russians will move in behind the Muzlems and gobble up the Dardanelles."

If trouble starts —

I meant it when I said I could see every kind of ship. Anchored just beyond the Golden Horn was the sleek greyness of an American battleship.

Banner put the red crayon back into his pocket. "Hasaan, you'll notice, wasn't just a Turk. He was an Arab — representing all of 'em. That Tarboosh, or fez, that he was wearing is illegal in this country. Kemel Ataturk banished 'em as headgear in 1925. At the same time he eliminated Arabic from the language and abolished harems." He heaved a gusty sigh. "I hated to hear about them harems going, but I suppose he knew what he was doing."

I couldn't tear my mind away from Hajji Hasaan. "Why was he wearing a tarboosh?"

Banner looked sly. "You said it showed he'd been to Mecca . . . Waal, he was the scourge of Islam. He came in last night with —" His eyes lighted up and he pointed directly over my head. "The flaming sword!"

I jumped and twisted around, flinging up my arm to ward off the stroke of Islamic vengeance.

But it was only the waiter hurrying back with our shish kebab, smoking on a spit.

AFTER LUNCH, BANNER LEFT ME, saying he had official business elsewhere, but that he'd get in touch with me at the Consulate. Freed of his overpowering presence, I wanted to be alone and think for a while as I strolled absently along the streets lined with cafes and shops.

The streets were flooded with American sailors in white uniforms at liberty from the anchored battleship. They were a boyish lot, playing leapfrog in the middle of the road, and at the same time trying to impress everyone of the wickedness of sailors of the United States Navy.

Many of them had a wild-eyed look, accosting every girl they met with "Hello, beautiful!" They wandered around offering candy, cigarettes, and lira notes to the girls.

I guess they spotted me for an American, for some of them, their eyes peeled for Shore Police, stopped me and asked me for directions. "We're looking for girls."

One of them, his middie bulging with souvenirs, asked: "Any Rachel Welsh movies playing in town?"

They still looked like kids, but they were men when it came to women or a fight.

I was drawn back to the Consulate. No sooner had I entered than a telephone operator gave me a scrawled message. "Mr. Cross, Senator Banner called. He wants you to meet him right away near the carpet merchants in the Great Bazaar."

"Isn't there anything more?"

"That's all, sir."

It seemed like an odd place to meet, but there was a schoolboy lurking in the large hulk of Senator Banner, so without questioning it I went out again.

THE GREAT BAZAAR HAD A BARREL-SHAPED ROOF, HIGH above, keeping out light and air, keeping in the heat and the dust and the mold of centuries, and keeping in the alluring reek of must and attar of roses, of incense and coffee. Everything was in a perpetual twilight, even at noon. Sunlight slanted down from slits of windows in the roof. And these shafts of sunshine were abuzz with flies and smoky with dustmotes. Crooked, cobblestoned, up-and-down streets led into the Bazaar. It seethed with adventure and excitement.

The shops and stalls were open caves in the grey stone walls. Bearded characters, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, squatted on piles of merchandise.

I thrust my way through the steaming multitude, hunting for Banner, but not seeing him anywhere. It was now mid-afternoon and the heat in here was oppressive.

I paused before a pile composed of six carpets, two saddlebags, a donkey bag, a prayer rug of goat's hair, and on top of all, an old man with a Baghdad boil right on the end of his nose, sitting crosslegged.

I stared at him and he stared right back at me with unblinking, beady eyes.

A thought passed through my mind.

... *Actor, magician, master mimic* ...

Then from the nearest minaret-mosque the muezzin cried out in Turkish the mid-afternoon call to prayer: "Allah is great, Allah is great; there is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet!"

It broke my impasse with the old Moslem. He stirred. He took a cake

of soap off a shelf, poured water out of a jar onto his horny hands to wash them, and protrated himself toward Mecca right there in his shop.

A hush fell over the Bazaar. Everywhere the faithful were getting down on the spot, touching foreheads to the ground, rumps in the air.

I found myself standing alone, a solitary Christian.

Where the hell was Banner?

Turning to look for him, I saw three ragged ones making an unhurried approach. They had their black eyes on me and they weren't concerned with praying. You can call them fellahs or pariahs, but I'll stick to plain hoodlums. All three were heavily built, with thick lips and reddish-brown skin. They circled me, getting me backed up against the rugs, and then one of them took out of his rags a knife that had a blade that was cleaner than any of them.

Nobody said anything. A shout from me would never arouse any of these prostrate Moslems. They wouldn't rise till they had finished saying their prayers. And by then I'd be just a corpse whose blood was ruining their carpets.

I didn't mince words with the leader, for his one purpose with the knife was to mince me.

I waited till he was about to close in, his grimy face leering and his body fetid with the heat, then I kicked him in the groin. With a sickening groan, he folded. The other two came down heavily on me, mashing my face into the rugs, making me eat ancient dust. The heat, weight, and dust smothered me.

I lashed out, using elbows, knees, feet. I got free once, was caught again, as the two struggled to pinion me down to let the third one get in his thrust with the knife.

This wasn't judo on a gym mat or even football. I can fight dirty, but it was three dirty fighters against one. It was a losing battle.

My wrists, slippery with sweat, twisted in their grip. I went down again. This time I knew I couldn't struggle up. I saw the third one crawl painfully to his feet, cursing in Turkish, steadying himself to find a soft spot between my ribs.

This was a moment for the Marines. But they didn't come.

The sailors came.

I heard a manly shout: "*Girls!*" There was a rumble of fast-flying feet coming straight up the Bazaar alley where we were locked in a death grip. "*Girls!*" howled the charging sailors.

The three bullies froze. The one with the knife took one look at the phalanx of white uniforms and he was struck with terror. Then they flung me aside and went scampering over the carpets, back to their

holes in the wall.

I waved my hand weakly at the oncoming sailors. "Thanks, fellows. I'll never —"

The whole howling mob went rumbling by me as if I never existed. There was on last battle cry of "*Girls!*" before they all vanished around the next corner.

WIPING THE BLINDING SWEAT OUT OF MY EYES with a dusty and torn coat-sleeve, I staggered to my feet. I blinked at the pile of rugs in front of the shop.

Banner was sitting on it, scowling like a buddha, fanning himself with his panama.

"By the eternal," he said. "You look like you've had it."

"Where have you been?" I gasped.

"I went back to the Consulate. They said you'd had a message from me to meet me here. I never phoned in any message. Someone impersonated my voice. They'd got you in here. They meant to kill you, Cross!"

"If those sailors hadn't chanced — "

"Chanced my fanny! I saw what was happening to you when I turned the corner. But I ain't built for sprinting. I'd never reach you in time. Those sailors were right there, crowding around me, pestering me with questions. I had a blazing inspiration. I told 'em there was a harem fulla *houris* stewing for a boatload of real he-men. And before the words were outta my mouth, they took off in the direction I was pointing. If they mistook the way I pronounced *houris* for something else, so much the better." He chuckled as he looked over the praying backs as the dust settled around us. Then he got serious. "Arla Geist has left for the airport, bag and baggage. You still got it?"

"Got what?" I panted.

"The li'l black book."

I knew he meant the German passport. I felt in my jacket pocket. "It's gone. Maybe it fell — "

"Don't waste time looking for it." Banner was sliding off the pile of rugs. Then, with a dazed look, he slapped himself in the forehead. "What a thundering ass I am! I shoulda known where he was all the time!"

"Who? Hajji Hasaan? Prospero?"

"C'mon!"

He went scrambling away, blundering through the praying Moslems. Some of them, starting to get to their feet, were bowled over.

Fists shook in the air. "*Kaffir!* Unbeliever! Infidel!"
We left the Bazaar behind us in a confused babble.

BANNER MAY NOT HAVE BEEN MUCH OF A SPRINTER, but he was great at long distance. I had all I could do to keep up with him.

We hit the hill ahead of us and went up, always up.

We climbed through a woody thicket of lacquered leaves, dark and spiky, where hidden birds whistled mournfully and rustled furtively.

We ran lurching through an ancient Mohammedan graveyard where all the tombstones and obelisks leaned crazily.

We emerged onto the open hillside. Once I looked back. Below us lay Istanbul, the old city, old Constantinople, old Byzantium, in all its seaweed hues.

Climbing up, I was surprised to find looming above us on the top of the hill the bandbox house of the Geists.

But Banner no longer took that direction. He veered sharply. We ran up the sag of a flight of drunken stone steps.

Ahead of us was a crumbling mosque with a squat minaret. A few stray pigeons scattered away from our scurrying feet as we went across the courtyard.

Then Banner stopped abruptly and slung his arm back at me. Too winded to speak, he was giving me the infantry signal to duck. The open doorway of the deserted mosque was handy and we staggered into its shade.

Peering around a column, I saw why we had taken cover.

The three ragged men, the three bullies of the Bazaar, were slinking away from behind the mosque.

Banner merely watched them.

"Are we going to let them get away?" I panted.

"Let 'em go. They're only paid murderers," said Banner. Then he added grimly: "So's the other one."

I watched the three ragged ones disappear down the hillside like three skulking jackals.

"Now," Banner grunted, "we gotta move quick — or he's gone!"

I didn't even ask who. I followed. We went cautiously now, running in spurts on tiptoes.

Behind the mosque was a little-known courtyard. Once it had belonged to a dervish monastery. The monastery was long deserted, since the dervish order was outlawed in Turkey. In the center of this courtyard were a few rotting old gravestones. They were pushed up into crooked angles by the live roots of a gnarled tree. The opening

graves looked like a mad scene from the Last Judgment. And it was to be the last judgment.

The cells of a long-dead monks gaped like hollow eyes in the ruined walls: The place was alive with pigeons, circling, the beat of their wings sounding like the flap of bedsheets hung out to dry in a high wind.

“Cross!” warned Banner. “Look out! There!”

Every nerve at high tension, I whirled in the direction he was pointing.

In one corner a door was beginning to slip open. A bent old man with a malicious brown face stumped out into the afternoon sunlight. He was in a simple black robe and mounted on wooden clogs.

I'd swear I'd never seen him before.

Below the doorway was another, more secret, courtyard. I had a glimpse of his home. The architecture was indescribable, for he was using the old monastery walls and the cisterns and the caves that composed the layers of past civilizations from which all Istanbul seemed to grow rather than be built.

“*Salaam alaykum. O mu' adhdhin!*” said Banner, bowing like a buffoon. “May peace be upon you, O muezzin!”

“Go away!” snarled the little old muezzin in plain English. “You stand on sacred ground!”

“We'll go,” said Banner agreeably. “Only you're coming with us — Geist!”

“Geist!” I said with alarm.

The little old man had finished talking. I later realized that he had to hurry. He would just about make the airport to catch the plane now.

He had the swift hands of a magician. Now they were empty. now a heavy-looking revolver was clutched in one of them.

He let go a shot and I hit the paving while pigeons fled from the reverberating blast.

Banner was crouching. He had done a little slight-of-hand himself, producing a snub-nosed banker's special from a hideout pocket. “No you don't! Not this time!”

Another shot stung the crumbling walls and the old muezzin grabbed his right shoulder, grimacing in pain, and dropped the gun.

Banner looked around. “You okay, Cross? Good! Pick up his hardware and see if he's got something in that shack to mend his busted wing with.”

Geist — for it was Geist — was lying full-length on the courtyard flagging, groaning.

I ran through the door and down the steps to the lair in the cistern.

Looking into the dim interior, my eyes still dazzled by the bright sunshine, I stopped short. I stared into another face. It was half buried under a pile of rags in the corner.

"Senator!" I called out. "If that's Geist out there, who's in here?"

"Whatcha got?" called back Banner.

"His face!"

"Bring it out, Cross! I'm curious to see it!" I could hear Banner's chuckle float down to me. "That's his death mask!"

THE TENSION AT THE CONSULATE HAD EASED CONSIDERABLY by the time Banner and I had showered and changed to clean clothes. I had a few ugly welts on my body, but, oddly, I hadn't begun to feel the painful effects of any of them till the excitement died down. Now I ached as if I'd played a Rose Bowl game.

Banner declared that my presence was necessary before he could make an official statement. And we appeared before appropriately-official witnesses in the late Consul's study.

Late afternoon sun was slanting through the green slats of the blinds as Banner said: "Gennelmen, the deception that was practiced on Cross at Geist's house last night was meant to be an alibi — not a vanish. If Geist hadn't forgotten to sign that passport application, he wouldn't have melted into thin air. It's as simple as that."

From the expressions of those listening, I could see that they didn't think it was so simple.

Banner cleared his throat. "Haaak! Cross, you said you saw Peter Geist standing in the dark doorway of his house last night. Now what didja see? Don't say, all of him. Specifically, what didja see?"

"His face," I said. "And his hands. And the magic robe."

"You're not being specific," scolded Banner. "You didn't see his hands. You saw white gloves. And you didn't see his face either. You saw this!"

With a flourish, he yanked a white napkin away from some objects on the desktop — and held up a realistic-looking mask of Peter Geist.

Banner said: "It's made of plaster and plastic, a composition called Miracleflesh, that looks and feels like real flesh. He had it made like a death mask. Only he's vain enough to wanna see it while he's still alive . . . You'll see, Cross and gennelmen, that attached to it on dark threads is a pair of white gloves, folded over each other, and when hanging down they'd reach to about where his tummy'd be. Cross, Geist hung this mask 'n' gloves on the front door of his house for you to see when you came at the appointed time. And that's all he hung there."

"What about the robe?" I asked, incredulous. "The one with the stars and crescents?"

Banner grinned. "You were thinking of Prospero, weren't you? Magic, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. It's all deception. You saw the face and the hands. And since your prosaic mind couldn't conceive of hands 'n' faces floating in space, you constructed the rest of the body outta dream material."

Awed at myself, I quoted Prospero: "*The stuff that dreams are made on.*"

"Yass. The crisscross of moonlight and shadows on the door helped the illusion. This mask was hung on the knocker of the black door. I told you that Geist was a head shorter'n you, Cross. That's about the height of the polished knocker. So what happened? Geist wasn't there. He'd told his wife that he wanted to *appear* to be there while he had business elsewhere. She didn't know what he was up to. She was merely a stage assistant. She was waiting for you, Cross. When she saw you appear at the courtyard gate, she merely opened the door. That's when you thought you saw Prospero take a step backward into the dark passageway. All that remained for her to do was to take the mask 'n' gloves off the door knocker and stuff 'em into that big knitting bag she had slung over her arm. When you reached the front door, it was fully open and she was ready for you. If you'd given her the two passports, that'd been the end of it. But you insisted on seeing Geist — an unforeseen development — and she had to go along with her husband's gag. He disappeared in spite of himself. When he returned, after you'd left, she told him what'd happened. So he went back into hiding to avoid answering a lotta embarrassing questions."

"Why," asked the vice-consul gravely, "should he go to all that hocus-pocus with Cross?"

Banner was grim. "You were a witness to that. He came into the dining room and shot the Consul dead."

"Geist is Hajji Hasaan!" There were stunned whispers.

"Sure he is, damn him!" cried Banner. "He tried to use the Russian Nagant revolver on us when we cornered him at the old mosque. He's burned the tarboosh and the burnous, but there's still remains of 'em in the ashes. He sicked those bullies on Cross to recover the passport. He couldn't go anywhere without it. And he had that on him too when we frisked him."

The room buzzed.

Banner looked at me, his eye kindling. "You ast me why he wore that tall illegal tarboosh. He was a short man, wasn't he? It made him look taller, changed his appearance. Likewise he padded his body and

put rubber gadgets inside his cheeks and nostrils to make him look like somebody else."

"Senator," I said, trying to remain calm, "there's still a miracle you haven't explained."

"Whuzzat?"

"How you knew where he was hiding? You went straight to him as if you were following road signs."

"In a way," said Banner. "he told me where he was. He spoke Arabic fluently, in order to pass as a mulla from Saudi Arabia, but he still stuck to Arabic when he chanted the mid-morning call to prayer from that minaret. We heard him when we were in Prospero's room, just about the time you thought he'd hidden himself in his furniture. *La ilaha illa 'llah; muhammad rasulu 'llah!* Remember? That's Arab lingo. I'd been holding all the cards — that's why I coulda kicked myself. I knew Ataturk had eliminated Arabic from the language and that all the other meuzzins call out in Turkish."

"He killed, I suppose," I said, "because he'd been given orders."

"Yass," said Banner slowly. "He was a Leftie in West Germany. That's why he had to get outta there. I didn't know that fact till a li'l while ago. And when you join *them*, you become not only the executioner — you're also the executed!"

MIKE'S MAIL Continued from page 57

comes in the mail when I did have a subscription. I have read Mike for as long as I can remember and I love the new type of cover. Also any by W.L. Fieldhouse about Major Lansing.

Mrs. Pat Wenk
720 W. Dewald
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46804

Never fear, Mrs. Wenk, help is on the way — in the form of a pristine-mint, never-before-eaten-by-dog-or-man copy of the tasty December issue. Have you considered buying a subscription for your dog? Most subscribers seem to be getting their copies a couple of weeks before it appears on the stands. Glad you like the covers; I'm not always 100% thrilled with all of them, but I think they're a lot more colorful than those used by some of the other magazines. As for Fieldhouse, there are several Lansing stories in inventory and we'll be using them every few months.

Continued on page 126



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HAMILTON

DOC SAVAGE

Circa 1933-37, I couldn't wait for the Third Friday of Every Month. The newsstands were a veritable Shangri-La for a Depression Child. And not the least of the delights and treasures was *Doc Savage Magazine*. There it was, with its grand Walter Baumhofer covers depicting Doc of the flake-gold eyes, bronzed sinews and extraordinary skills. And those titles — magical words the like of which I had never seen before until comic book, TV repetition and derivative-series cheapened them: *The Man of Bronze*, *The Land of Terror*, *Meteor Menace*, *The Monsters*, *The Man Who Shook the Earth*, *Fear Cay*, *The Mystic Mullah*, *The Majii*, *Death in Silver*, *Resurrection Day* — be still, my brain! — *The Land of Always Night*, *The Thousand-Headed Man* . . .

What a glorious crew: Clark Savage, Jr.; Andrew Blodgett Mayfair; Theodore Marley Brooks; John Renwick; Thomas Roberts; William Harper Littlejohn — Doc, Monk, Ham, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny to us all. Going to impossible far-off places, doing impossible things, achieving the utmost — and all in Lester Dent's peerless, punchy, graphic prose. Never before, after, or since has there been such an intrepid, fascinating crew of action-heroes. And it was all early sci-fi, too — the best kind. Brains plus brawn, with a thrill a paragraph:

*"Get the bloody Vickers! Let 'em bleed!"
The Vickers Bleed.*

More! More! MORE!

I was asked to update the Savage series in '63 when Bantam decided to launch Kenneth Robeson again. I demurred — it would be like tampering with a time machine. They discovered I was right. The money went to other hands, but I have never been sorry. I know my readers. What I liked in Doc Savage I knew they would. History proved me. Bantam is up to its 100th Doc Savage reprint.

I have never been surprised that the movies and radio have never been able to capture the Doc Savage magic. It was born and bred on pulp paper and the pages of magazines — that doorway to the young imagination. And Lester Dent was the only one who had the key to it all.

Superman was clearly an outgrowth of Clark Savage, Jr.
Let the record so show.
On a trilling end-note.

*The bodies were piling up — all strangled with a wire
and with a piano key left on the corpses!*

In The Key Of Murder

by HAL CHARLES

WHEN I GOT WORD THEY'D PULLED ANOTHER BODY out of The Canal, I had just settled down on the couch with Jess. I'd picked her up, or vice-versa, in Bill's Body Shop, a downtown disco. Now I like Bogart too, but *Casablanca* for the sixth time wasn't what I hoped to turn on.

"But Wiley," Jess whispered, fingering my hair, "I've got this thing for Bogie."

So I played it again. Ingrid Bergman had just entered Rick's when the phone rang.

"Mr. Wiley," said a shrill voice, "this is your answering service."

That was strange. "I don't have an answering service, pal."

"Yes, you do," shouted the voice in a huskier tone. "In fact, if you'd ever stay at your desk, I wouldn't have to work overtime answering your calls."

It was Wolfe, my new editor.

"The scanner's been lighting up like a pinball machine," he continued. "Get over to the Birdwell Bridge. They've found another one."

I tried to tell Jess that I had to go, but she was too wrapped up in Bogart's warning Sam not to play "As Time Goes By." Finally in desperation I knelt down between her and the tube. All that got me was a vacant stare and a "When you smile, you look so much like Bogie." So I winked and headed out the door.

A PROCESSION OF COPS TOPPED THE LOW RISE above the Canal.

The detective in front dispersed the uniformed patrolmen, propped his foot upon the ambulance's rear bumper, and began to wipe the mud from his imported Italian loafers.

"Lockhart," I called, "what'a you got?"

"Not you again," he said without looking up.

"Give me a break, pal. I'm just doing my job."

"Tell me you were just doing your job in those articles you've been writing about organized crime in Dade County. You've been making us look pretty bad."

"Funny, I thought the mob was doing that — without my help."

"Tell you what," he said. "I'm gonna give you a close look at what we got — because you and I are friends."

He casually flipped back the sheet covering the figure in the rear of the ambulance.

After a pause, I asked, "Strangled?"

"Third one in less than two weeks."

"With a wire?"

"Yeah."

"Any leads?"

"No comment."

That was the third time I'd heard that choice phrase. The newshole was closed tight, but no matter how much I pushed Lockhart he wouldn't budge. The night ended in total loss. By the time I got home, all that I found was a test pattern and a note from Jess: "If you want me, just whistle. You know how to whistle, don't you?"

I HAVE THIS THEORY THAT SOMEWHERE IN THE VICINITY of Madison Avenue is a Xerox machine that turns out the Jonathan Wolfs of this world. Five foot, ten inches . . . razor-styled hair . . . nasal voice . . . a three-piece suit . . . a book by Korda or Ringer on his desk . . . a Ph.D. in EST . . . and the face of a choir boy. Entering his paneled office, I sat down in front of a no-smoking sign — GET YOUR BUTT OUT OF HERE — and lit up a cheap cigar.

I don't even smoke.

"Wiley, you middle-aged journalists are why most newspapers are still operating in the Dark Ages."

I didn't bother to point out there were no newspapers then.

He stood up, fanned my smoke with some computer printouts, and informed me how *The Chronicle* was going to make more money for its new Australian owners. "Demographics. Today, it's all demographics. People don't want just straight facts; they want to be titillated by what's happening." He held up the copy I'd turned in on last night's

strangling. "I had to rewrite your piece. Too much of that journalism-school who-what-where-when garbage. Even your investigative series is dry, impersonal. Who's gonna read it? From now on, you're *off* the strangling, you're *off* the organized crime series. Until you learn to write, I'm transferring you to the Entertainment Section."

"Oh, the front page?"

"Not funny! And unless I see stories more in line with our new policy, you won't be writing for *The Chronicle*; you'll be reading it — in the unemployment line!"

I stubbed the cigar out in the headline he'd written over my copy: WHERE WILL CANAL STRANGLER STRIKE NEXT?

AFTER A DULL AFTERNOON OF INTERVIEWING a washed-up movie actor who was making his latest comeback on the dinner-theatre circuit, I felt I deserved a little relaxation at Bill's Body Shop. The main reason I had been there last night was a tip I'd gotten while doing my organized crime series that the disco might be one of the mob's distribution points for dope. The big bad Wolfe wasn't going to kick me off a story I'd worked months on. And besides, if I ran into Jess . . .

It was John Travolta Look-alike Night. So many guys with Roman noses and black shirts were strutting about I felt surrounded by Mussolini's honor guard. Some female singer was quadraphonically celebrating her lovelife, and the Art Deco mirrors were crowded with flashing lights and skinny girls in skirts slit to their thighs.

Through the marijuana-laced smoke, I couldn't believe what I saw rapidly approaching me. With a gold lame jump-suit, sequined letters across the breast pocket, and red rollerskates, he looked like a refugee from *The Wizard of Oz*.

"I'm the deejay, Doctor Flash. Bartender said you wanted to rap. What's your game?"

"I work for *The Chronicle*."

"Love your rag's new direction. Course my boss Mr. F. don't dig anything the papers run on the crime biz."

I could understand Mr. F's feeling. My sources had indicated Robert Framingham, the club's owner, was an upcoming figure in Miami crime.

The Doctor snapped his fingers. "Bet I knew why you're here. That dude they found in The Canal last night was a club regular."

"He was?"

"Yeah — hey, didn't I see you last night? From my perch upstairs I don't miss much. Yeah, you were with Jess. Now that's some fine fox."

A buzzer suddenly sounded from the Doctor's wrist. "Time to work," he said and promptly skated off toward his booth.

JESS NEVER SHOWED, BUT LATER THAT NIGHT I wormed her address out of the Doctor. It was a house down by the beach.

In the dark of the coast road it took awhile to locate the mailbox: L & J HARPER. L — husband, friend, parent? Beyond the small stucco the waves slapped the shore with a good clean sound that was so different from the city's horns and harsh crowds.

I peered through the window into a dimly-lit living room done in wicker. Over a corner bar a neon sign kept announcing RICK'S CAFE AMERICAIN, and beneath a paddle fan hung a blowup, a publicity picture of a young Bogart with his arm around some brunette. Draped across a high-backed chair lay a sportscoat and a white uniform with a nametag: J. HARPER, Baker Memorial.

Feeling like a peeping tom, I drove home and liberated six friends from their refrigerated captivity. They weren't very talkative, but at least they didn't disappoint me.

The next morning I called Jenkins, the Entertainment Editor, to tell him my followup on the dinner-theatre story would keep me out of the office all day. At the disco I'd gotten a hunch I wanted to check out.

Collins, the old morgue attendant, let me peek at the autopsy report out of friendship and a ten dollar bill. Roberts, The Canal's latest unsuccessful swimmer, had traces of drugs in his system.

That night I had just rescued my burned TV dinner from the oven when the phone rang. It was my "reliable source" from the cop house.

"Number four," he announced as though it had been a winning lottery ticket.

"Where?"

"The Canal, one mile north of the last one."

JUST AS I PULLED UP BEHIND A WAREHOUSE COMPLEX, I spotted Lockhart's tailored sportscoat arriving. He went straight to the salvaged body and knelt down. Reaching into the soggy inside coat pocket, he drew out a long, white object with his handkerchief.

"You've been holding out on me," I said.

"Wiley, didn't I ask you to say away?"

"I'm collecting a due bill, that tip on the bank embezzlement."

Lockhart hesitated, then stood up. "O.K., hotshot. I'll lay it out for you, but it's off the record."

"Agreed."

He opened the handkerchief. The red ambulance light played off a

yellowed piano key.

Despite my early-morning call, The Body Shop was glad to give me the Doctor's home address. Somehow they got the impression I was *The Chronicle's* Entertainment Editor doing a spread on the disco scene. Before heading north, I borrowed an envelope from Wolfe's empty office.

Not quite what I expected, the Doctor's place was a small, run-down shack in a wooded area near The Canal. The moment I stepped out of my army-surplus jeep I heard an ax ringing, and behind the house I spotted a muscular figure in a plaid shirt chopping wood.

"Dr. Flash?"

The man wheeled abruptly and glared. "It's Cleveland Russell here, man. Wait a minute," he said, wiping his forehead. "you're the reporter from The Shop. What do you want?"

"Just a few questions about the disco."

"Listen, I keep my job and my private life separate. When I get away from that madhouse, I don't want to think about the music, those polyester people with their flashy bankrolls, and those chicks who give you the come-on when all they want to do is dance."

As he balanced the ax on the stump, I could certainly see a change. He'd lost the jivey speech and mellow mood of the night before. I opened the envelope and showed him some pictures. "Ever see any of these at The Shop?"

"Yeah," he admitted. "Big spenders — around the club a lot. Now I got work to do." He raised the ax and brought it down with such a vicious blow the stump split.

I'm no expert on body language, but I got the message. Besides, he'd told me what I wanted to know: all four murder victims frequented The Body Shop.

When I got home, I called Jess' beachhouse with no luck. Then I remembered the dress with the nametag and dialed Baker Memorial. Jess didn't respond to the page, but finally a deep-voiced woman who identified herself as Jess' superior answered. I explained to her that I was Jess' cousin.

"I'm sorry, but Nurse Harper hasn't been in for over a week. A death in the family — her mother. They lived together and I understand Nurse Harper took the loss hard."

That cleared up the "L" on the mailbox.

I drove back to the morgue. Needing twenty for an investment at Hialeah, Swipe was happy to leave the file cabinet open during his coffee break. A quick flip through the reports on the four strangling victims revealed an interesting similarity our local Kojak had failed to

tell me. At the time of their deaths, all four had been shot full of morphine.

FROM THE PERCH OF DR. FLASH'S RECORD PLATFORM, I strained through a stroboscopic smog onto the dancers below. As though the disco floor were electrified, the couples jerked in uneven rhythms and their heads, bobbing up and down, reminded me of the plastic dolls we all used to ride around with on our dashboards.

In the crowd I picked out an old friend. Without his three-piece suit and his symbols of power, he was difficult to recognize, but the guy in my sun-burst orange shirt Latin Hustling a Scandinavian blonde was my editor: the Wolfe and the lamb *shall* feed together.

Sensing the crowd's slowing pulse, the Doctor increased the decibels. Over in a roped-off corner sat Framingham. Like some distant god, his huge figure squatted impassively, aloof from the chaos his club set in motion.

I don't know when I first spotted Jess. I had probably watched her for half an hour before my mind caught up. A single stalk of corn in the middle of a tornado, she swayed amidst the barrage of sound and color. Couples backed off the floor and let her go. She was on something. Dope? Grief?

Maybe I was starting to understand her. It was easy to lose yourself, your problems, in such a frenetic, anonymous place as this. Everyone had the right to react differently to the death of a loved one.

Working my way down and through the crowd, I grabbed her arm, but I had trouble getting her attention. She was giddy.

"I'm sorry about your mother," I tried.

Jess came to an abrupt halt, her face growing blank as she said, "She meant so much to me. I'll never be able to repay her for everything." Jess wiped an eye and turned her head.

"Why don't I take you home?"

Her eyes widened. "Go home? Tonight I want to dance, dance, dance." And then she whispered in my ear, "Tomorrow night, my place, 8:00. I'll teach you how to whistle."

Before I could stop her, she grabbed some guy and headed for the center of the dance floor.

I knew how Bogie felt — always after the girl he couldn't have.

I FELT THE WAY MY REFRIGERATOR LOOKED — EMPTY. I was sitting at the kitchen table staring at a six-pack I'd picked up on the way home. Things had been moving too fast, and I needed some time to think it all out. My private life was a mess, my unofficial story on

drugs and organized crime was going nowhere, and the stranglings had me baffled.

Somewhere in the drafty attic of my mind, I knew there was a pattern to all this. In the center of the table I placed an empty bowl — The Body Shop was in the middle of everything. Since all the murdered men were regulars at the club, I poured some chips into the bowl. All the victims were full of dope when they were found.

I took another swig of beer. I'd been hanging out at the disco because I suspected it was the mob's distribution point for drugs. Wasn't it logical that the stranglings were connected to the mob? But why? Greedy pushers?

Framingham. I set the bottle down. Did he have the four men murdered? Maybe as an example?

Draining the second bottle, I thought of the others connected. Like Dr. Flash. He obviously knew all the regulars and hated them for their "flashy bankrolls." Any guy who could split a stump like that was capable of violence. And why did the Doctor stay around a job he hated? Money? I sat the second empty down.

Then there was Wolfe. Why had he pulled me from both the mob and the strangling stories? Was I getting too close to "friends" of his at the club? Well, he had replaced my old editor right after the organized crime series started and the paper was sold. Heck, I was getting paranoid beginning to think that the new Australian owner might actually be closer to home. The mob had bought everything else — why not a paper?

And four piano keys?

None of it made sense. But late that night the brigade of bottles surrounding the bowl gave me an idea, and I made a late phone call.

LOCKHART JERKED A NINE-IRON FROM HIS BAG. "You're ruining my one free morning with your cock-and-bull theory that Framingham's behind the killings."

"Why not? All the victims were loaded with dope, they hung out at The Body Shop, and we both know that place dispenses more drugs than a hospital."

"That's penny-ante trade. Ludes, coke, angel dust, a little pot. Keep the customers happy, that's all. Besides, Framingham doesn't mess with morphine, horse — any of the real hard stuff. And now, if you don't stop playing Woodward or Bernstein, you'll have me looking at a bogey."

Just as a vague pattern started to form, Lockhart's beeper went off. He didn't even have time to tell me they'd fished out number five.

AS I TURNED THE CRANK OF THE MICROFILM READER in *The Chronicle's* morgue, my mind kept wandering to the fifth victim. Like the others he had been strangled with a wire, and a piano key had been left on his body.

Just as the sun and my eyelids were going down, I found it. Nestled between a review of *The More The Merrier* and Winchell's column was the string that tied the whole package together — an item in *Tinseltown Tidbits*. The whole thing was almost too hard to believe.

I PARKED THE JEEP NEAR THE WATER. IT WAS ONLY 7:30. I came in through the front door without knocking — it didn't bother me this time.

The sunset illuminated a wall drape with movie posters: Bogart as Duke Mantee in *The Petrified Forest*, Bogart as Red Kennedy in *San Quentin*. A small porcelain falcon perched on a shelf above the bar like an idol in its niche.

I studied the faded promo I had seen earlier. Dressed in a calf length, taffeta gown with her hair swept back, the brunette looked a lot like Jess. I read the inscription: "Yours forever, Bogie."

But what I was really looking for wasn't there.

I went down a hall and through a doorway. A relic from the past, the back room was filled with wicker furniture, ornate lights, and showed not a speck of dust. In the far corner loomed an upright piano with a purse on top. I crossed the Moroccan rug and lifted up the keyboard cover.

Six keys were missing.

The floor creaked and I turned around.

"You're early," she said, fixing me with a glazed stare.

"I like your decor, especially the promo with Bogart and the brunette."

"That's my mother."

"Lorraine Harper, the one-time starlet who dropped out of the movie scene over thirty years ago?"

"She met him on the set of *Casablanca*. You can tell from the photo that they were deeply in love."

"It's just a publicity shot."

"No," Jess said, the blood rushing to her pale face. "She had his baby."

"According to the papers, the judges dismissed her paternity suit as being absolutely without cause."

"They were in love," she protested. "Her whole world was built

around waiting for him to come back."

"It was a fantasy, Jess; Hollywood's famous for fantasy. And now she's dead. Don't keep doing this — it was *her* fantasy, not yours."

Her eyes looked through me, and her body grew rigid. "You won't get away with it. Every day you didn't come back, she sat at this piano, playing 'As Time Goes By' and dying a little more."

Jess lunged for the purse, but I grabbed it ahead of her.

"How long did you think it would be before the hospital discovered that much morphine missing and figured out who had access?"

"I'll kill you," she screamed, her limp hands clutching for my throat, "just like you killed *her*, BOGART!"

Then, sobbing like a helpless child, she slipped to the floor. The whole time I waited for Lockhart to arrive, she never moved.

WOLFE LOVED MY STORY, ALTHOUGH I REFUSED TO TITLE IT "I Was the Sixth Key." Even now, seeing it in black and white, it's difficult to believe how much grief can distort reality.

I tried going back to The Body Shop. When the new deejay played some group's disco version of "As Time Goes By," I started to protest that they had ruined the song. But it was too late for that. ●

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SIDE VIEW



ILLINOIS STATE BUREAU OR CRIMINAL IDENTIFICATION
AND INVESTIGATION.

J.P. Sullivan, Supt.

Springfield, Illinois

Maybe it was the whistle that had called the green eyes from that other place. Anyway, there they were over the curtain, against the stars, waiting . . .

Whistle

by MIGNON GLASS

SHE WAS SITTING ON THE TOILET when she first saw them. Green eyes over the curtain, and that was all. Ocean green eyes and the night behind.

What had called them up from that other place? A merging of the two worlds perhaps? Or was it only her whistle? Soft and secure. Maybe it was just that vulnerable position she was in. Yellow lace down around her little girl ankles. Tongue in the hollow of her cheek, tasting peppermint and a hint of this morning's fudge.

She shook her brown curls as she bent to lift up the panties. Yes, maybe the whistle *was* the link! She had tried dozens of things: shutting her eyes as tight as could be, until the grey carpet came and she would sway, singing the song she learned in her Purple Jungle Dreams:

*Hey Ho, I'm all in yellow!
Bongo, let's go to Connigo!
Hey Hee, see my macheteee! . . .*

But they hadn't worked. Maybe the tigers had to sing along, but they only came when she was asleep, and didn't care much for puzzles anyway.

So now she tried a whistle, just like the one she used on Nero, her boxer. The whistle had done the trick. Called them up from that other place.

She wondered what would send them back.

HANNAH ROLLED OVER ON HER SIDE.

"So you see, Bea," she spoke to the plastic cylinder full of marbles, lying on her pillow. "I know he's around here somewhere. I guess he's just nervous about . . . you know." Her voice became a whisper, a murmur; she punched the pillow and Bea rolled off.

Hannah closed her eyes, whistled low. She opened them slowly and looked behind her. She could see her Freddy Farnsworth flannel night-shirt wadded in a heap in the corner of the room. Her puzzle was still there too, half-finished on the miniature picnic table work bench her father had built. Stuffed alligators and bears, tigers and hippos lounged, silently beckoning, "Come play with us! Feel our soft fuuur! Aren't we pretty?"

Hannah ignored their calls. Blue, dirty sneakers sat on her orange, plastic stool. "Wanna go for a turn around the lake, kid? Hey, how 'bout a climb in old Meyer's apple tree?!"

Hannah had no time for play.

She looked out the window.

"Mama!"

SHE TIPTOED TO THE PANTRY. Not that she needed to. From a chink in the wall she had a bird's-eye-view of all the commotion in the living room. A Hannah's-eye-view, the best kind: safe, quiet, secret.

"I suppose we've waited long enough. I mean," her mother's voice was clear, yet strained, "I might as well get the formalities over with." She laughed, a bitter jolt to the crowd as they lowered the volume of their chatter. "The neighbors," her voice was reduced to a near whisper and Hannah watched her lips as they moved over the words, "family . . . you all . . . Hannah . . . what will people . . ." She covered her face with barely trembling hands. Her wedding ring absent.

Lou, Hannah's older sister, rose from a lotus position on the floor and went to her mother, put her arms around the smaller woman. "Mother, we can get Uncle Frank to help with the arrangements. A simple service. Uncle Frank wil be glad to help. Won't you, Uncle Frank?" Lou raised her questioning eyebrows at a tall, greying man, silent in the kitchen doorway, drinking a glass of wine.

"What's that?"

"I said, 'Uncle Frank will be glad to help with the service.'"

"Sure. Sure. Anything you say."

Lou continued, "Mom, it's form, you know. Custom. Sure, it'll hurt, but you can't wait forever."

"All right then. How about next week? A few friends. Family. A simple service. A token — "

"Now that's a girl!" Uncle Frank sat down, placed his arm across the back of the sofa. "A little guitar music maybe?"

"Good Lord, Frank, this isn't going to be a wedding," Lou said.

"I was thinking maybe, uh, 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters'."

"There'll be enough crying without that, thanks."

"Now you two are getting glib. Tragedy, it makes you crazy."

Hannah slipped down from her perch, the pantry stool, went into the kitchen. She stood in the doorway to the livingroom, announcing herself with her mere presence.

"Oh, come in here, darling. Say hello to your Uncle Frank."

"Yes, mama. Hello, Frank."

"Well good day to you too, Little Miss Alabama."

"Huh?"

"Don't pay any attention to your Uncle, dear."

"Mama, what color eyes does Daddy have?"

"What?"

"I said, what color are Daddy's — "

"Green. He had green. Go on and play dear. We're busy in here."

THE GUESTS LEFT, ONE BY ONE. Alabama dusk rolled in, the crickets began their evening rituals, wind blew the swing set and it creaked.

Hannah sat on her bed, playing with Bea.

"Out with the marbles, in with the marbles. Bea minus three marbles. Still Bea. Just don't lose all your marbles!"

Hannah heard a moan.

"What's that, Bea?"

Hannah got up and went to the window. Nothing there. She opened her bedroom door, looked to the left, the right, down the stairs. Nothing. Nobody. She turned back into her room. Pushing her dresses out of the way she mounted the closet shelves, to the top one, her secret place. With her back pressing against the wall, her feet propped on the clothes rod, she lifted the corner of her Winnie the Pooh poster. Another Hannah's-eye-view: her mother's bedroom.

Uncle Frank was naked. An overturned glass on the carpet, her mother's dress in a heap on the chair. Shoes, a billfold, sighs.

"Frank, I've waited all day."

"Hmmm." Uncle Frank's back was all that Hannah could see, moving up and down, up and down.

"Jeeezus!"

Hannah climbed back down the shelves. Winnie's foot taped neatly in place.

She walked back to her bed. Whistling.

In the window a green eye shone.

Hey Ho, you're all in yellow!

Bon Go, let's go to Connego!

Hey Hee, see my macheteeee!

Hannah fell asleep. The tigers sang all night.

HANNAH WONDERED WHERE HER DADDY WAS NOW, while she sat, pink and proper on the church pew. Mama wore black.

"I want to wear black too, Mama." Hanna had made a face in the mirror as her mother fluffed out the pink cotton dress, smoothed the sash down to where it wouldn't stick out at right angles from her back-side.

"Little girls don't need to be wearing such depressing clothes."

"Why are you wearing them then?"

"I'm not a little girl. Hannah, this isn't a real funeral. You know, your father is, uh—is dead, but, we need to have some sort of service in his memory. The Space Center has already authorized . . ."

"Mama, what happened to him? Really?"

"The ship — they don't know, dear. You're a big girl. I want to be totally honest with you. He's in heaven now."

So that was it, huh? Churning somewhere between universes. Split apart? Together? Apart?

Hannah knew. Green eyes over the curtain. Floating among the stars, where he always liked being the best anyway.

The service was over in record time.

"Got to stop in here for a second, dear." She had pulled in front of Uncle Frank's apartment.

"Wasn't he at the funeral?"

"Uh, yes dear. He sat near the back. I've just got to arrange a few leftover details with him and I'll be right back. You sit here now." And she slammed the door and ran up the sidewalk, holding her black skirt over her knees as she ran.

BACK HOME HANNAH SAT AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, eating ice cream. Uncle Frank read a Newsweek. Her mother washed dishes.

"I've got to run to the store for a few things, dear. You mind your Uncle Frank now. You hear?"

"Yes mama." Hannah finished her ice cream and left.

THE DOOR HAD BEEN CLOSED SINCE THAT MORNING they brought the news to her mother. It still smelled of cedar, of his books, of the wild. The wild of her dreams. She remembered surprising him before bedtime. He would be sitting on his sofa, feet propped on a stool, gazing at the ceiling.

"Boo, Daddy!"

"Boo yourself." He'd put her on his lap and sing, *"Hey ho, Hey Hee, Hattie ho from Tennessee."*

"No Daddy! It's Hannah from Alabaaama!"

"Oh, excuse me Hattie, uh, I mean Hannah. My, what an odd little munchkin you are!"

"What an odd big munchkin you are!"

She looked at his bookshelves, his pictures. She sat down on the fur rug and looked at his display. Swords, knives. He'd collected them from all over.

Hannah got up and stood on the sofa. She ran her fingers across the hilt of a silver and turquoise knife.

"Now, when you're a big lady this one might be yours. If you're careful, of course. It's the perfect Hannah knife."

"Of course!"

"Never!" her mother had scowled. *"No daughter of mine is going to be running around like a little hoodlum . . ."*

"I can open my letters with it, mama."

"Yes, she can file her nails with it too, honey."

She lay on her belly on the fur rug, feeling warm and soft. Daddy. A tear ran down her cheek, across her nose, plopped on the fur. Daddy.

She looked back up at the knives, remembering the summer at her grandmothers. Chopping, working in the garden. The too-sweet taste of sugar cane. She couldn't seem to get enough. She finally did, though. Got sick all in the horse trough. *"Too much sweet is gonna make you sour!"* Silly Daddy.

She got up and went into the living room. Uncle Frank lay on the couch; a football game blaring, but he was oblivious, snoring.

He couldn't feel the shine in her little girl's hands. He didn't feel it either, not until it was too late.

"THREE MARBLES IN. STILL BEA. A BLUE ONE, A GREEN ONE." Hannah looked up. Green eyes passing by the window, growing dimmer, dimmer . . . She rolled over on her back, looked up at the ceiling. Hummed a catchy tune, something like:

Hey Ho, I'm all in yellow . . .

'She heard a muffled sound in the hall. She opened the door and peered out — and fainted! It wasn't every day she saw a dead man with a meatcleaver in his head!'

Don't Dare Reject this Manuscript

by WILLIAM SCHOELL

LIZ WHIRLED THROUGH THE RECEPTION AREA and walked briskly towards her office down the hall. The corridor widened at one point, swelling with three desks, where her staff of readers would be busy going through the slush piles of the day. More and more of those large, brown envelopes every morning and twice as many in the afternoon. Full of junk, mostly; scribbles from high school rejects. Imagine making a living reading trash like that. She sighed, catching Lennie's eye.

He looked up from a xerox copy of something called "The Hatchet Queen" and was impressed — as usual — by her fresh-looking, rather breathless appearance. "Still wearing a glow and you're not even married yet," he said, running a hand across his hairline, brushing back stray strands of jetblack hair. He was a youthful forty-year-old, passing time reading manuscripts while he worked at his novel. *Everyone* was working on a novel.

Liz smiled warmly, slowing down by his desk, still remembering the pleasant weekend she had spent with her fiance. "I'm glad it shows. The big day is only a week off. I don't want to get blasé about it already."

"You, blasé? Never." He picked up his cup of coffee.

"Where are the others?" she asked, motioning towards the other two empty desks.

"Gladys called in sick, and Herbert is — is just late. He should be

here shortly. It's only 9:15."

"I can't complain. I haven't been on time for a month."

"That's why I love you, boss."

"Anything good?" she asked, pointing towards his pile of envelopes.

"Too early to tell. If I'm to judge by this story, it's going to be a dreadful day indeed."

She laughed with him, then entered her office, amazed again at the mess she could make in so small a space. She had to do a lot of co-ordinating with the rest of the staff this week to get the next issue of *Midnight Mystery Magazine* ready for the printer by the end of the week. The stories they'd decided on were all in a neat, square pile on one corner of her desk, waiting for her nimble touch with a red pencil. Two or three of them were actually good. One, she recalled was terrific.

First she walked over to the small sink set into the wall and washed her hands, then wiped the city grime from her attractive, 35-year-old face. Her black hair hung becomingly down along the sides of her head.

So, she thought, you're getting hitched. Why not? You were never one to advocate matrimony, true, and he's a wonderful guy, you can keep on working just as you always have, and you'll both have the benefit of that much more time spent with the other. Yes, why not? He was an advertising executive, and both their salaries combined would guarantee them a nice, if not necessarily luxurious, lifestyle. Comfortable and companionable.

Herbert came in then — she could see him through her open door — a man of 53 with thick spectacles and thinning blond hair, wearing his perpetual frown. He removed a bulky raincoat and draped it over his chair. "Good morning, good morning," he said to no one and to everyone. "Terrible weather, isn't it?"

"Why are you wearing a raincoat?" Lennie asked. "It's not raining."

"But I thought it was going to rain, with all those clouds up there. An awful day. I lost my umbrella last Tuesday at the movies. Third one I've lost in as many months. I give up."

He got some coffee, then hovered over his desk while Lennie dropped a pile of envelopes on the blotter. "Now, what have we here? Ah, the little cretins have sent in another pile of their excruciating scratchings. What shall the first one be, do you think? The old maniac-on-the-loose ploy? The murder mystery with one, obvious suspect? Or how about the cop-gone-bad routine?"

It wasn't any of those. It was yet another variation on the Jack the Ripper theme, filled with gobs of sexy horseplay. "This is a *family* publication," Herbert groaned, flipping the story hastily into its self-addressed stamped envelope and putting it in the *rejected - mail out* pile. "All we want to read about are murders, murders and more murders; nothing *nasty*."

He opened the second envelope. "Oh no — it's one from *him* again. That mental defective in New Jersey. I won't even bother!" Without unfolding the story, he slipped it, too, into the self-addressed stamped envelope, then licked it shut and put it on the pile. Coming from her office, Liz witnessed this episode. Normally she didn't like it when her readers didn't *read* everything they received, at least a page or two to see what was up, but she knew that they had so many stories to plow through that they couldn't waste time with the obviously hopeless cases.

THE MORNING WENT ON AS USUAL UNTIL 11:15. Liz's phone rang. At once she recognized the nasal, slightly accented voice on the other end. "Miss Stuart? Is that you, Miss Stuart?"

Damn, she hadn't thought he was going to call again. He'd frightened her so much the first two times. It had been nearly a week since the last call, and she'd figured that he'd moved on to some other editor of some other magazine. Did he only contribute to mystery mags?

"Miss Stuart. I got it in the mail today. Another rejection. I told you if you rejected me one more time I would kill you. And you did reject me. Do you know what I'm going to do?"

He was crazy. She would have to weigh her words carefully.

"If you call again, I will notify the police. You're not the only person in the world to receive a rejection slip. Why don't you try a little harder. We have — we have standards to uphold."

"My stories are better than the crap you publish. Look at your last issue. 'The Final Word,'" he sneered, "by J.D. Hortense. Why do you print that hack's work? It had no mystery, no suspense, an obvious and flawed conclusion. Does he pay you to print his claptrap? Answer me!"

"J.D. Hortense is a respected writer in the field. I suggest you study his work and —" *Click!*

He had hung up on her this time.

She waited a little while for her nerves to calm down. Was he dangerous? She'd read somewhere that these phone freaks rarely carried out their threats, that they were shy, desperate people who used the phone to bolster their egos. Nothing more. She took a tranquilizer and waited for lunch time, when her fiance, Robert Higgins, would take her

out for something to eat.

He arrived at the office promptly at noon, and found her putting on her coat.

"How's the day going?" he asked.

"Oh, Robert. That awful man called again. I'll tell you about it over lunch."

ROBERT WAS A HANDSOME OLDER MAN, almost twenty years her senior. But it had been "love at first sight" since that rainy day when they'd shared the same cab. It had pulled over to where they both stood at the curb before the office building, and though Robert had graciously offered it to her, Liz felt compelled to ask him to join her. It had been pouring, and few taxis were available. After that, she had occasionally seen him in the elevator, and he told her that he worked for the advertising firm on the twentieth floor. One day he finally asked her out and one thing led to another.

They went to Luigi's Italian Restaurant across the street, ordered some delicious spaghetti dishes, and talked about the problem.

"How come this phone caller gets past the receptionist?" Robert asked. "Doesn't she field all calls first?"

"Yes, but she doesn't recognize his voice. And I like to be accessible. I can't stop talking to *everyone* — including writers — just because of one fruitcake. I'm supposed to answer all editorial queries."

"You've said that he's called you 'unfair.' Is there any truth to his accusation?"

He sipped some red wine while she thought over his question. She bit into a break stick, and talked through the messy, falling crumbs.

"It's hard to say without knowing who he is, and what he's sent to us. Robert, we even get stories from — from children — or at least they *look* that way. Manuscripts that aren't typed, that are illegible, or illiterate. All of our submissions are written by people who are convinced, absolutely *convinced*, that they can write. Some of them can. But their stories are rejected for any number of reasons that has nothing to do with their talent or lack of *safne*. Some stories are too derivative. Some are much too similar to something else we've published. Some are implausible, though beautifully crafted otherwise. Some are illogical, senseless, or too gory, or devoid of suspense. Do you understand?"

"Of course. Then there's nothing unfair going on at all, is there?"

"Well." She hesitated, not sure of how to phrase it, or even if she should. "There are some things I don't like, which I'm forced to do;

certain practices I must adhere to. For instance, we're always getting stories from this famous suspense writer, J.D. Hortense. Frankly, Robert, they're awful. The man lost his touch twenty years ago. Oh, they're professional enough to get by, but weak, silly, unbelievable."

"Why do you print them?"

"Prestige. Isn't that silly? Hortense is a big name. He attracts other big names. I think he broke into the business because he was a personal friend of our former publisher."

"Aren't you sacrificing the quality of your periodical?"

"Yes. Our would-be writers read his material and think they can to just as well, and half of them *can* do just as well, so we get overstocked with lousy contributions from these people who mimic Hortense without even trying to do better. Some of these stories we *have* to buy, just to fill up space. We'd love to get a lot of fine, original manuscripts in the mail, but there're so few of them. And anything which is *too* out of the way must get rejected."

"But you just said you *wanted* original material."

"Yes, but remember that our readers are mostly conservative, middle-class. We can't offend their sensibilities. Oh, damn it, in a way that nut who keeps calling me is right. He complained today about J.D. Hortense, and I found myself going quite automatically into my usual patented defense, even though I secretly agreed with him. But he scares me nonetheless." She stared around the room looking for strange faces, feeling paranoid.

"It sounds to me as if you're almost programmed into mediocrity."

"Don't say that, darling. It's not all that bad."

"Is there any way you can discover the caller's identity, just to be on the safe side?"

"We get countless manuscripts each day. Most are sent back. Frequently we get submissions from the same people over and over again. There's no way of knowing which stories were his, when they were rejected, nor when he got them back in the mail. Except for the one he mentioned today, of course. It's hopeless."

"You *know* which story it was he mentioned on the phone this morning?"

"No. Only that he got one of them returned today. See, there's no way we can track him down."

"Don't worry, dear. I doubt if anything will really happen. Finish your meal. The clam sauce is delicious."

She tasted it. It was. But she simply *wasn't* hungry.

SHE GOT BACK TO THE OFFICE AT ONE THIRTY. Herbert was

busy at his desk. Lenny was still out.

"Cliches, cliches, a mass of cliches," Herbert was muttering. "Why does this ignoramus bother sending in this garbage?"

Liz had nothing to do until the art director got back from lunch and she could go over the layouts with him. She picked up a few envelopes, determined to make a small dent in the pile Gladys wouldn't be going through. It was awful when they got swamped.

The first was a near-pornographic tale of a crazed dismemberer. Forget it. The second, a cops and robbers tale with a hackneyed twist at the end. Uh-uh. The third was a very moving, very well-written account of a poor man trying to steal petty cash in order to feed his infant son. The author did it so well that it wasn't at all corny. But the ending was weak, the suspense just frittered away. What a shame.

She put it in the SASE and enclosed one of the "does not suit our present needs" cards in with it. She pulled the card back out on impulse; her eyes strayed over it. "Due to the vast number of submissions we regret that we cannot reply personally." Ah, what the hell. Somebody had spent a good part of his day working on this and it wasn't that bad. It was tough to think about the heartaches and disappointments she was doling out to all the clerks, typists, stock boys in there who wanted to join the elite class of free-lance writers; subsequently, she tried not to think about it at all. But now and then she saw a glimmer of talent, something to be nurtured and sustained, something to be commended. There was a danger in doing so — often the author would inundate the office with too many manuscripts written in a hurry, none up to snuff. But sometimes they would respond with the true gem. She scribbled on the rejection slip: "Nice work; you can write. But this story is not right for us. Try again."

She wrote no more, no less. She didn't want to get into the trap of writing little novels detailing problems for each good, if unsuitable, manuscript she read.

He called again at 2. He was babbling this time, almost incoherently. "I'll get each of your crummy readers, one by one, until I finally reach you," was one recognizable phrase that stood out in her mind. Readers? The ones who bought the magazine? Or her *staff* of readers? The latter most likely. He was a loon, true, but surely not crazy enough to think he could destroy several thousand people. (Hadn't there been a story some time ago about a deranged bomb expert who — oh, no matter).

She hung up on him again, still shaking. Anyone could walk up to this office, walk in the door, brush past reception, walk down the hall, open her door, level a gun at her head and . . .

She heard a muffled, but close, sickening sound like a *glop* from out in the hall; then running footsteps. She opened the door and peered out.

Then fainted dead away on the blue carpeted floor.

LIZ STAYED HOME FROM WORK THE NEXT DAY. Robert came to see her at lunchtime, holding her hands, warming them, warming her, reassuring her.

"I should go back in, I know," she said. "I can't hide myself away here forever. He might know where I live by now, anyway."

"Now, now, darling, no one would expect you to go back to work so soon after seeing, after — "

She finished the sentence for him in her mind: *After seeing Herbert lying dead in his chair. After all, it isn't every day you see a man with a meatcleaver in his head.*

It was all so terrible, so unreal, she thought. So *unreal?* A cliche. *Mustn't use a cliche.* Damn — she couldn't get out of the office even when she was in her own bedroom.

"What a horrible way to die," she said to Robert. *Hackneyed, hackneyed*, she could hear Herbert saying in his familiar baritone. *Who writes your dialogue, lady?* She almost laughed out loud, but didn't. Robert would have been appalled.

The worst thing was that her horrible fantasy had come true. The killer had been walking into the office even as she thought about the possibility of just such an entrance. He probably phoned her from right out in the reception area, as the receptionist told police she had been in the ladies' room during the grisly event. (The Killer must have watched and waited out in the hall until she left.) Lennie had still been out to lunch and she had been in her office with the door closed, and Herbert — poor Herbert — engrossed in the slush pile, had been the perfect, unwilling victim.

Who would die next?

It didn't take long to find out. The phone rang just as Robert was preparing to leave for his office. It was the police. It seemed that Herbert had not been the first victim after all. Gladys had not stayed home today due to illness, but rather because someone had snuck in and strangled her the day before in her bedroom. — in the morning, at least two hours before Herbert had died. He must have killed her right before that first phone call! Liz put the phone down before the officer had finished, not wanting to hear any more. She told Robert what had happened: "I was wondering why she wouldn't answer my calls," she said feebly.

Robert picked up the phone again and called the police back. "She's in shock, Lieutenant. Can you come out here now, and bring someone along to watch her this afternoon? You can ask her all the questions you want to if I can stay with her while you do. She needs moral support."

The Lieutenant agreed. He wanted to question Liz further without delay. When he arrived he asked her to go about her daily routine as usual, starting the following day, and assured her that someone would be watching her at all times. He would have men posted in and around the office, too.

"We're not sure the two murders are even connected, but after what you've told us, it's a possibility," the Lieutenant said.

"But Gladys' death implies that the man knows more about us than we'd ever suspect," Liz whined, "even our addresses."

"Well," the Officer held up a copy of *Midnight Mystery Magazine*, "your staff is listed on the first page. He just looked up her address in the phone book."

Liz sighed. That was no consolation. The thought that *anyone* could find out where they lived was just as frightening as the thought that the killer was someone they knew and saw everyday. A messenger? A delivery boy? Someone with access to the office, certainly.

THE NEXT DAY SHE AND LENNY SAT AT THEIR DESKS and skimmed listlessly through manuscripts that seemed thoroughly without importance in comparison to the brutal deaths of their two associates. They'd read of so many strangulations, axe murders, harassment campaigns, disturbed criminals — and now they were close to being characters in one of their own stories. Usually, Liz would have been fascinated listening to police procedure, but hearing the detectives recount how they'd gone over both the office and Gladys' apartment for clues held no thrill for her. This was one mystery that held no vicarious pleasure. The killer failed to call again during the day; she had been expecting his taunts. He had already made his point most succinctly. Liz was now taking him quite seriously indeed.

During a coffee break, Lennie broke his vow of silence and spoke out on the issue at hand. "Are we sure — I mean really sure — that the guy on the phone is the killer?"

"Lennie, the chances that two people would develop a pathological grudge against the magazine — and against us — at the same time is a bit of a coincidence."

"We deal in coincidences," he said flippantly, wishing he hadn't said it quite that way. "Besides, think of all the frustrated authors

we disappoint and anger every day by rejecting them. There must be thousands of them!"

The thought chilled Liz further. Thousands of them, hurt, angry, some of them crazy enough to do something about it. She rejected the notion as too frightening to contemplate, especially at this time, with two empty desks staring her in the face. "Come on, Lenny. Most of our submitters are perfectly balanced people who accept a rejection slip as a matter of course. Do actors come unglued because they fail to properly impress at an audition? Now and then, maybe. Oh, I don't want to talk about it!"

But Lennie did. He was trying to convince himself — or have someone convince him — that the killer was someone who'd murdered Herbert and Gladys for reasons that had nothing to do with the magazine. To go along with Liz's theory meant that he was undoubtedly the next victim: Lennie Armer, Assistant Editor, next on the rung, next in line to be strangled or cleaved. And he had read enough stories to know that police were ineffectual when it came to saving people in his predicament. Reading about murder was one thing, getting killed was quite another. "Maybe the killer struck for reasons that have nothing to do with *Midnight*," he said. "Maybe it was a maniac, or two maniacs, or . . . I don't know." He stopped suddenly, wiped his forehead and said, "When are the funerals?"

"That reminds me. I have to check back with Gladys' mother this afternoon. Herbert's brother is taking care of his arrangements; I should know about them later, too."

A well-dressed man in his forties approached Lennie's desk, whipping out a card and badge when he saw the nervous look on their faces. "Just checking up. Is everything all right?"

"Yes. Yes, thank you," Liz said.

She went back in her office after the man left and read through some more manuscripts, though if anyone had asked her to recite the plot of any of them she wouldn't have been able to. The day proceeded on its dreary course. She lunched with Robert, trying all the while to determine which patron was the plainclothes man assigned to watch her movements.

Around three p.m. she carried more envelopes into her office to sift through, dropping them messily onto her desk. She noticed one particular return address: J.D. Hortense had sent in a new one. If only she had the nerve to reject one of his works, just once. She wasn't looking forward to subjecting herself to his vapid plotting, dragging pace and unremarkable denouement. She shuffled his envelope back in with the others; she'd get to it in time.

IT WAS NEARLY FIVE WHEN SHE NEARED THE BOTTOM of the pile. *We're going to need help, Lennie and I*, she thought, *but I can't even think about hiring new people. Not so soon — so soon after . . .* Her mind still on other things, she began the next story, wishing that it was time to go home.

Five minutes later she was shaking in terror!

The story was about an editor of a mystery magazine whose life was threatened by a rejected author who called her up repeatedly and then began murdering off her staff of readers!

She flipped back to page one. The story was entitled DON'T DARE REJECT THIS MANUSCRIPT and was written by J.D. Hortense!

It was inconceivable, but Hortense seemed to know everything about her. Was he a psychic gifted with precognition? She'd never even met the man — his stuff had always been sent by either mail or messenger — yet he described her down to her shade of nail polish, described Lennie, Gladys, Herbert — even Robert — in perfect detail! What her office looked like. What her daily routine consisted of. Where she usually ate lunch . . . It was incredible! And the *deaths* were the same, too.

She was about to go out to the policeman on duty when the door opened and Robert walked in.

She was too excited to wonder why he was there or to bother with pleasantries. "Robert, darling. You won't believe it. This — this story! J.D. Hortense must be behind this. I don't know why, we buy all his stuff — "

The amiable, polite look on Robert's face vanished abruptly, replaced by something more akin to hostile resignation. "Oh, so you got to the story today. I'm so glad you were the one to read it. It makes things so much more — symmetrical, I suppose."

"Robert. What are you talking about?"

"Realism, my love. Believability. Everything should be genuine. I like to research down to the smallest detail. I slipped the story in with the others lying on Lennie's desk when I picked you up for lunch. He'd already left, I guess."

"What on Earth — " He was starting to frighten her. Her eyes turned nervously towards the envelope from which she'd removed Hortense's fiction; there was no postage on it. That would explain why the events described within were so uncannily similar.

"When I decided to do this story, I knew everything had to be as authentic as possible. To write about it successfully, I had to enact the crimes. What you said the other day at lunch, unkind as it was, was

absolutely true. I was getting rusty; my stories were stale. I no longer believed in them myself. I had to — if you'll excuse the cliche — pump fresh blood into them."

"Robert, stop teasing me this minute. This is serious! I don't find your actions the least bit — " She stopped short as he approached. He wasn't Robert Higgins anymore; he was someone else. He was —

"J.D. Hortense, that's who I really am. 'Robert Higgins' is just a character with his own apartment and an extra phone with a 'work number' hidden in a drawer. I saw you from afar at a writer's convention. I listened spellbound as you gave a speech about mystery writing; its virtues and pitfalls. You were quite good. That's when I got the idea: *Rejected author harasses editor, kills off staff*. So I arranged to meet you 'accidentally', and the rest you already know."

"You don't work for an ad firm on' the 20th floor, do you?" Liz choked. "And you're not in love with me, are you? And you're not Robert Higgins? Everything was just a lie. I wondered why you always insisted on meeting me at my office. Why you had no friends."

"It was all for the sake of the story, darling." He suddenly started speaking with an accent, like the outraged, rejected author he'd pretended to be on the phone. "For the sake of my art. Oh, I can tell, you think I'm crazy. I'm sure I am." He stepped in front of the door and blocked it with his body. "Don't bother screaming. I've already taken care of the detective and Lennie. They never knew what hit them. I'm the last person they expected to send them off to dreamland for a while. And I sent your receptionist off on a nice, little errand. Even promised to watch the phones for her. The little darling has such a crush on me. Of course, being on your staff, poor Lennie won't be waking up."

"You're J.D. Hortense!" was all Liz could say, over and over again. "You only proposed because you've yet to have a fiance as the killer."

He pointed to his story, which she had left unfinished and open on her desk. "You'll notice that the last few pages are blank. I'll type in the finale later, from memory. I'm still waiting to see how it comes out. Nothing beats *experience*, don't you agree?"

"Too busy trying to summon up a scream, she didn't answer.

"Didn't you like my little joke, raving about 'Hortense' on the phone. A nice touch, don't you think?" He looked at his watch. "It's getting late. I'd better get this over with before that cop out there wakes up. I have to go through with it. I have to be able to describe your death rattle perfectly. It's what my readers expect; nothing less will do."

And Liz couldn't help but think as his arms wrapped tightly around her throat: *It's the best thing he's ever written.*

The three bikers stood at the edge of the lake and tried to coax the two girls onto shore. Finally, the fat biker pulled out an automatic and pointed it. The girls had to come out then!

Animal Sounds

by DON WALL

OLD PURVIS SPIED ON THE TWO GIRLS as they set up camp. He was hunkered down about forty yards from them in a stand of young larches, peering through the feathery, light-green growth. The girls were maybe nineteen or twenty, kind of wholesome-looking. The blonde was hefty, big-bosomed, the one with the long dark hair slender and quick-moving. The blonde pitched the small tent while the other one built a fire pit with rocks from the shore, gathered wood, and started a fire for their noon meal.

They weren't gigglers or squealers, at least. Purvis had to give them that. He didn't like other people being at what he had come to think of as his lake, but there they were. Well, maybe they wouldn't stay long, with any luck.

It wasn't a lake people came to much, but only because they didn't know about it. It was too small to be on any but large-scale maps, and no name when it did appear. Most people'd probably think it was

just some pond, looking on a map. And it was hard to get to: eleven miles of mountain road and then an overgrown five-mile logging road that would tear the oil pan off those modern, low-slung cars. The girls had come on bicycles. Purvis always walked in.

His Pa had first taken him to the lake when he was ten, and for the next fifty years, with only a few misses, he'd been coming here in late June for a couple weeks' fishing. The lake, deep and spring-fed, had warmed up just enough by then so that the cutthroats were active. In late June the trout would come to shallower water, to take the canned corn Purvis always used for bait.

There'd been other campers at the lake over the years, but not many, and not recently. They'd all set up in the same place, a small, grassy clearing where the road, what was left of it, ended. Quiet types, mostly, though to Purvis anybody else around was noise, disturbance, an intrusion. When others came, he stayed out of their way.

In all those years, none of the intruders had ever found Purvis' camp at the opposite end of the lake, around a wooded point. There was another small point beyond that, a rocky one supporting a big Ponderosa pine. The rocky point was his fishing spot. The gray-green water dropped off sharply to thirty feet right there and the point caught the sun all day, warming the stiffness out of Purvis' joints. The camp, a wood lean-to, was thirty yards back from the lake under a rock ledge screened by a thick stand of cedars.

PURVIS DIDN'T THINK OF THE BEAR AS AN INTRUDER. The huge old silvertip had first showed up five years ago and decided to make it his territory. Purvis had even come to kind of like the bear; he was the reason nobody'd come these last few years. There'd been a family camped in a truck with one of those fancy boxes on it — had windows, beds, a stove, a sink, nearly everything a house had in it. They must have cooked something that appealed to Old Silver, because the second evening they were there, the bear came to dinner.

Purvis was attracted by the growls and shouting. He saw the father jump in the cab, the rest of the family pile into the camper and slam the door. Bear must've been hungry: he ripped out one of those little windows with a swipe of his paw. There was a moment of silence, and then the screeching really got loud. The truck started up and sped down the logging road like it was a superhighway. Purvis could hear pots and pans banging around inside, along with the yelling.

He hoped the girls wouldn't be bothered, though, and nodded approvingly as the slim dark one hung their bag of food high up from a small tree two hundred feet from the tent.

"Let's take a dip, Janie," the blonde said, and started to take off her clothes. Purvis turned away and slipped quietly back to his end of the lake. He didn't like to invade other people's territory any more than he liked them to invade his.

WHEN HE GOT BACK TO HIS CAMP, he re-marked some of his own small territory, the way his Pa had taught him. Every fifty feet or so, in a fifty-yard radius around his campsite, Purvis had urinated on a rock, a tree, a bush, a stump. Purvis had been there before Old Silver and the bear respected the man's small territory. After all, the old man didn't roam around much. Not any more. He camped, fished, dreamed by his small fire, watched the crawdads scuttle in the shadows.

It was a good thing the bear tolerated Purvis, because there wasn't much Purvis could do about the critter. Purvis hadn't lived sixty years without learning when to fight, when to run, and when to let be.

He knew better than to tempt the bear too much, though. Bears loved bacon, and so did Purvis. He'd had some for breakfast every one of the years since he'd had teeth to chew it and it wasn't a habit he intended to give up until he didn't have teeth any more. No bear was going to change that, either. So he kept his supply tightly sealed in plastic bags, to keep the scent from wafting out. After cooking, he emptied the grease in a hole well beyond his marked territory and left the pan soaking in the lake until the next morning.

He heard the girls laughing and splashing in the lake, and then he caught another sound. An engine. No, more than one. Loud. Rapidly getting louder. Snarling and growling, like animals. Motorcycles. They stopped by the clearing at the end of the road.

Purvis could still move fast when he wanted to. In a few minutes he was back among the young tamaracks.

THERE WERE THREE BIKERS, with long, greasy-looking hair and beards. All wore jeans, big boots. One had a denim jacket with a white-painted clenched fist, middle finger raised, on the back. The other two had studded black leather vests on with no shirts. All three were big.

They had left their big black cycles with the funny-looking handlebars and were standing on the shore, confronting the girls who were standing in neck-deep water. Only the water was so clear that even from where Purvis was he could see they'd been skinny-dipping.

The fat one in the vest was coaxing the girls to come out.

"C'mon, we ain't gonna hurt ya. Hey! You must be cold! This'll warm ya up!" He waved a bottle of whiskey at them.

"No, thanks," the girl the other had called Janie said. Her voice was

even, but Purvis could hear the fear in it. "Please. Just let us alone."

"Hey, no call not to be friendly," the fat biker said. He passed the bottle to denim-jacket, who took a pull. "We ain't from around here — we're from back east. How about showing us some of that western hospitality?"

The other two laughed, but they weren't nice laughs, like the girls'd made swimming. More like some kind of mean animal noise.

Then the fat one pulled up his right pantleg. He had some kind of cloth band around his calf. He pulled a small automatic from it and pointed it at the girls.

They had to come out, then.

PURVIS STAYED THERE, GETTING SICKER BY THE MINUTE. The things they said. The things they did. Purvis never knew there were people like that. After a while he couldn't stand to watch any more, but the sounds were almost worse. Animal sounds. Grunts. Squeals. High-pitched laughter that hurt your ears worse than a bandsaw going through pine knots. And the helpless animal sounds: the moans, the whimpers, the cries, the weak pleas.

His hands shredded the needles from a branch, but there wasn't anything he could do. No gun; five-foot seven; a hundred and forty-six pounds. Sixty years old. The smallest of them was six foot, nearly two hundred pounds. He could not fight them. And it was too far to run to get help.

Near dusk, the three let the girls go. They limped and stumbled down the logging road, heads lowered. Sixteen miles in the dark, down the mountain. It would be late the next morning before the girls found any other people, if they could keep going that long.

The bikers dragged the girls' sleeping bags from the tent and spread them by the fire. They passed another bottle around and talked. Their talk made Purvis even sicker.

Soon the three of them crawled into the small tent. When all he could hear was their drunken snores, Purvis went back to his camp. He made one trip back to the tent, quietly, carrying a couple of plastic bags. None of the three awoke.

IT WAS AROUND ONE IN THE MORNING WHEN PURVIS HEARD the sounds he'd been waiting for. Cries of alarm. Screams. Frantic curses. Growls. A shot. Growls turning to roars.

Soon there were no more cries or curses, only growls. Good, animal sounds.

Purvis went without breakfast that morning, but he didn't mind. ●

Who had killed Captain Vinson thirty-nine years ago in 1942 in the jungles of Guadalcanal? Had the jungle and the years eaten up the evidence? I had to find out!

Delayed Verdict

by R.C. TUTTLE

GUADALCANAL 1981.

I walked through the overgrown, insect laden jungle and finally came to the sandy ridge overlooking the rock strewn beach below. It was a beautiful sight, a typical example of tropical island beauty with the breaking surf hitting the beach, palms leaning gracefully toward the blue ocean, a small ship easing along the horizon — right out of a Hollywood South Sea movie.

The last time I had set foot on this ridge was in 1942, a time when a careless move meant instant death. I had been involved in a murder investigation. How idiotic it sounds now! A murder investigation in the land of sudden death!

Captain John Vinson, one of the most miserable SOBs ever to come out of Quantico, had been shot in the back one rainy night. The high brass, determined to find out who shot him, assigned young Lieutenant Milo Cannon the task of investigating the case. So Cannon has brought all of his most likely suspects to this ridge for questioning. I, Corporal Lennie Bullard, was assisting. The other five marines were prime suspects. We were all fully armed because air raids and enemy patrol activity were part of the daily fare.

I stood there, remembering what had happened 39 years ago . . .

PRIVATE PETE VALDEZ WAS SITTING over by a jagged piece of volcanic rock, cigarette dangling out of his large mouth, one hand clasping the rifle and the other draped over the surface of the rock. His rather handsome, swarthy face was tense and his narrowed brown eyes were riveted on the young Lieutenant Milo Cannon who was sitting across from him, his straight back resting against a coconut palm. They were two extremes of American life. Valdez was a product of the Los Angeles jungle, a part of that city where life and death run hand in hand. Cannon was from the upper crust of Boston society, a Harvard graduate, newly graduated lawyer — top in his class — the whole success routine. He was a fine featured, intense young man with short brown hair and a trim, well-proportioned body. During the college days he had been a top notch tennis player and could hold his own on a polo pony.

Stan Martin and Mario Lucca, both privates, were sitting by another palm staring down at the startling beauty of the rocky beach about a hundred yards down the horizon. Martin was a big, well built, good looking guy with a round, usually pleasant face and blond hair. He was an ex-football star and one of the best catchers we ever had on our company baseball team. Lucca was tall, thin and had a face that resembled a ferret — an angry ferret. He was always sore at something or somebody.

Doc Wendal, a Corporal, was a medium sized, slender man with a narrow, intelligent face. A Ph.D. from M.I.T., Doc could probably have gone to OCS and become an officer, but for some stupid reason known only to himself he preferred the enlisted ranks. Where the rest of us read dirty books and girlie magazines in our spare time, Doc read chemistry and physics books. He was also the best shot in the company. He was sitting next to Lucca drawing formulas in the sand with his forefinger.

The last of the suspects was Hal Swenson, a former Hollywood actor. I recall seeing him in several B pictures and while he was no Barrymore, he could handle a role as well as the next man. He was a tall, dark handsome guy — the Errol Flynn type — who acted as though the war was nothing more than a long, drawn-out movie. He was sitting near me, back against a rock.

I'm a little guy — barely made the height lower limit.

"GENTLEMEN," BEGAN CANNON, "the purpose of this investigation is to determine the killer of Captain John Vinson." He motioned toward me with a manicured hand. "Corporal Bullard will take notes."

He paused. "As you all know, Captain Vinson was shot from behind two weeks ago. He had just left the Officer's Club and was on his way back to his quarters when the killer shot him." He opened a small, flat metal case and slid out a notebook.

Cannon left out the fact that Vinson was roaring drunk. I know. I was working behind the bar in the club that night and served him his final scotch and hot water. Let's say he was staggering back to his quarters.

Valdez laughed suddenly. "Man — why can't we do this in Los Angeles?"

Cannon ignored the comment. "My preliminary investigation indicates that you five are the prime suspects."

Lucca held up his rifle. "I did it, Lieutenant. Now, you can send me back to New York."

"Perhaps," Cannon said smoothly, "you did, Lucca. However, let us proceed with the investigation." He glanced at me. "Are you ready, Bullard?"

"Ready, Sir," I answered.

Cannon frowned at Lucca. "You have a forty-five caliber revolver Lucca?"

"Sure. We all got one, Lieutenant."

Because of stepped up enemy activity, all the enlisted men were issued forty-fives.

"Where were you on the night of the murder, Lucca?" asked Cannon, his eyes boring into the dark face.

Lucca shrugged. "I dunno. I think I was having a beer down on the beach. Yeah." He looked at Valdez. "You were with me. Remember?"

"There hasn't been a beer issue in three weeks," Cannon said. "Where'd you get a can of beer?"

"Sir," I said, somewhat lamely. "I gave it to them. The can was — damaged."

He looked at me sternly. "Bullard, you are allowed to work in the club — this is a trust — " he paused. "That's something I'll deal with after the investigation. Let us continue."

Actually, it was three unbent cans of beer — as good as gold in the Guadalcanal Hell hole.

Cannon transferred his gaze to Lucca. "You disliked Vinson intensely, didn't you?"

The part-statement, part-question was abrupt, bringing a scowl to Lucca's face. His lips twisted slightly.

"I dunno. Maybe."

Maybe? Lucca hated Vinson, as did all the men in the company.

"Maybe?" Cannon peered at Lucca. "Did he make comments about

your ethnic background?"

"Sure. He called me names." Lucca looked down at the sand for a moment. "Always asking me how things were with the mob — stuff like that."

Again, understated. Vinson had been a first class bigot and poor Lucca had been a prime target for his acid-loaded remarks.

"Captain Vinson," admitted Cannon, "did have an unfortunate habit of kidding people — perhaps too much."

"But," said Lucca, "that ain't nothing new. I been hearing that stuff all my life."

"Sure," said Valdez, "Lucca and I been catching hell ever since we were born. We could have shot lots of people. Right, Lucca?"

Lucca nodded. Actually, despite their common ethnic-inspired problem, the two had never been very friendly. However, it was quite true that the two had shared some beer that night.

Cannon nodded. "Leaving ethnic considerations aside — Lucca, wasn't there some problem regarding your sister's photograph?"

Lucca looked toward the ocean. "I don't wanna talk about that."

"We must talk about it, Lucca," Cannon said flatly, leaning forward slightly. "According to my informant, Vinson removed the photo from your pack and tacked it up in the Officer's latrine."

The picture wasn't his sister. The girl was one of his many girl friends — and she had posed topless. He had tried to pass her off as his sister — why, I don't know.

Martin spoke suddenly — almost absently. "I pulled it off the wall and gave it back to Lucca. Vinson made me clean up in there one day."

"Did Vinson order you to remove the picture?" Cannon asked Martin.

Martin laughed. "Lordy, no." He had a broad, midwestern accent. "I guess he was pretty mad about it."

"Was he aware that you removed the picture?" Cannon asked.

"I don't think so." Martin pursed his lips. "I think he blamed you."

There was a twinkle in his eyes and his voice held pseudo serious tones.

Cannon stepped right into the little word trap. "Why would I do that?" he asked Martin.

"I can't imagine," said Wental. His accent was Boston, similar to Cannon's. His face was expressionless.

Cannon reddened slightly. "You went to M.I.T.?"

Wental nodded. "I did."

"I went to Harvard," Cannon said. His tone implied that Harvard was much the better school.

"You had a better football team," admitted Wendal.

The two beans from Boston eyed each other for an instant, then Cannon went on.

"Your relationship with Vinson was rather poor, was it not?" Cannon flicked some sand off of his pants.

"Rather," answered Wendal. "As far as I was concerned, he was a first class S.O.B. and I can't say I'm sorry he's dead."

Vinson had made life miserable for Wendal. As soon as he found out that he had a M.I.T. graduate in his company, he literally pounced on him, giving him the worst assignments and in general trying to make a damn fool out of the chemist.

Cannon studied his fellow Bostonian for an instant, then turned back to Martin. "You were an all American football player. Right?"

Martin nodded. "Right." A grim look came over his face. "Vinson never let me forget it. He couldn't even make the B team at the Naval Academy."

"Football isn't everything," Cannon said. "I can't play football but I can beat you in tennis."

Martin shrugged. "I'm pretty good at tennis. We'll have to play sometime."

That brought a round of laughter from the peasantry and a tight smile from Cannon. The idea of a tennis game on Guadalcanal in 1942 was grimly funny.

CANNON, STILL WEARING A FAINT SMILE, quickly lighted a cigarette. "Some afternoon when we're both free," he said. He turned serious again. "Martin, two days before Vinson's death, you threatened to kill him. Why?"

Martin's face lost some of its good nature. "Just my mouth talking. He made some dirty crack about my girl friend. He saw her picture." He stared out at the ocean for an instant. "She's kinda chubby and he called her fatto."

Remarks like that came up large on this lovely tropical island.

"A tasteless remark," Cannon said, "but one must remember that Captain Vinson had been fighting this war ever since Pearl Harbor."

His effort to defend Vinson's actions brought only sneers. That stuff sounds great in the safety of a Shrink's office but out here . . .

"Well," stated Martin, "I didn't kill him."

Cannon eyed him an instant, then suddenly pointed a finger at Swenson, who was half asleep. "Swenson, you had problems with Vinson too, didn't you?"

Swenson shrugged. "He called me pretty boy, used to make fun of

my acting — ” Swenson had a low, well modulated voice. “I’ve seen sharks out here that I’ve liked better.”

“How about the incident in the club?” Cannon’s face tightened. “He made you dress up like a woman and do a strip tease. I would say he made a damn fool out of you.”

“I lived through it — and the guys got a couple of laughs.” Swenson grinned. “Actually, it gave me a chance to get away from all this bull for a few minutes.”

Valdez suddenly pointed up at the sky. “Hey — ain’t that a Zero?”

We all looked up and saw a single plane circling around as though the pilot was making observations. Another appeared out of a cloud.

Martin half rose and looked toward the ocean. “There’s a sub!”

We automatically checked our rifles and set our helmets. Cannon looked at Swenson.

“Where were you on the night of the murder?” he asked.

Swenson’s eyes widened in amazement. “Lieutenant, there’s a Japanese sub out there and two zeros circling overhead! They’re going to pull a hit and run raid!”

“Perhaps, Lieutenant,” I suggested, “one of us ought to go back to the main camp and tell — ”

“Nonsense!” snapped Cannon. “Our planes will be over in a few minutes to take care of them.” He glared at Swenson. “Now, damn it, where were you that night?”

We all exchanged glances. Cannon was becoming as nutty as Vinson.

Swenson, his eyes on the sub and the small boat emerging from the conning tower, grinned. “I don’t believe this. Okay — I was waiting on tables in the club.”

“I didn’t see you that night!” Cannon shot back. “I was in the club.”

Swenson grinned again. “Let’s face it, Lieutenant, two beers and you can’t see anybody.”

How true. Cannon was not a drinker — especially in this hot, humid weather.

“Is that a fact!” Cannon’s face reddened with anger.

Lucca pointed toward the sub. “Hey — there’s a bunch of them coming ashore!”

ONE OF THE ZEROS CAME AT US SUDDENLY, guns spitting death. We all became marines — death dealing warriors. This is what we did best, including Cannon. We didn’t waste ammunition on the speeding plane, but we did train our guns on the oncoming landing party of

about twelve.

Cannon glanced at Swenson. "Why don't you pretend this is a movie and you're the star, Swenson?"

"How do you suppose I get through this lousy war?" returned Swenson through tight lips.

"While you're at it, Swenson," said Wendal, "pretend you're a Captain and order us all the hell out of here."

Swenson shook his head. "According to the script, you've got to be a hero and stay."

The boatful of soldiers had hit the surf and the landing party was unloading on the beach.

We all glanced at Cannon, waiting for some sort of an order to fire. He studied the oncoming raiding party.

"Damn! Why did they have to come now?"

Lucca shrugged. "Why don't you tell them we're busy and to come back tomorrow?"

Cannon glared at Lucca for an instant. "Don't think for a moment that we aren't going to have this murder trial, Lucca. And that goes for the rest of you!"

"How about the murders coming up?" asked Martin. "Somebody gonna investigate them?"

"War is war, and murder is murder," Cannon shot back.

"There's a difference?" asked Wendal.

Before Cannon could answer, the Zero made a bullet scattering pass at us and the raiding party came at us guns blazing. One of them tossed a grenade which exploded behind us. We settled down to the business of fighting back, something we were quite efficient at. Within ten minutes, there were eight lifeless bodies on the beach and the rest of them had retreated.

Martin had caught a bullet in the forehead.

Valdez checked him. "Dead," he said simply, tossing Martin's rifle to Cannon. "You're gonna need it, Lieutenant."

The second Zero made another pass at us, then disappeared in the clouds. The other followed.

Cannon looked at Martin as though he couldn't quite believe that the big football player was dead. "I could have beat you in tennis, Martin," he said in a far away voice. Then he came back to earth. "Let us continue — if no one is in need of medical aid."

We weren't.

Cannon eyed Swenson. "Swenson, what about that business with the USO troupe?"

Valdez shuddered in ecstasy. "Man — that blonde."

"Yes," said Cannon, still eyeing Swenson. "What about that blonde?" He paused. "And that walk into the jungle?"

"Just a harmless walk." Swenson grinned, looking like a dirty-faced Errol Flynn. "I knew her in Hollywood. Old friend."

BULL! ONLY TWO SUBJECTS OCCUPIED THE FELLOWS' MINDS on Guadalcanal — death, and sex. Since death was all around us in various forms, most daydreams concerned sex. So when this lovely, shapely blonde arrived unexpectedly, blood pressures rose. Normally, USO troupes didn't stop here because of the heavy enemy activity. However, a combination of engine problems and a tropical storm forced the USO plane down on our airstrip. So they did a show. Vinson had been put in charge of the three girls, and he had his evil eye fixed on the blonde.

Swenson, who knew the girl well, had somehow gotten her away from Vinson. Then, with Valdez and I standing watch for snipers, Swenson and the girl had put on one of the wildest displays of sex I have ever seen.

A simple walk indeed! Vinson was crazy but he wasn't a dummy. He knew damn well what happened. An enlisted man had beat him to the draw.

Cannon, who had been digesting Swenson's answer, spoke again. "A harmless walk, my Aunt Edna. Vinson was aware that it wasn't a harmless walk. You made a fool out of Vinson."

The grin persisted on Swenson's face — the memory of that afternoon, no doubt. There was a slight smile on Valdez's face, and I found myself grinning.

Seeing our grins, Cannon became infuriated. "This isn't funny!" He leaned toward Swenson. "You had sex with that girl, didn't you?"

A look of psuedo shock spread across Swenson's face. "Wash your mouth out with soap, Lieutenant." He looked around at the rest of us. "Fellows, would I do a thing like that?"

"No!" we cried, looking as innocent as possible under the circumstances.

Then, we all laughed — even Wendal who rarely even smiled.

Cannon looked toward the sky. "And to think I could have gone into the Navy." He became businesslike, pointing a finger at Swenson. "Then, Vinson dropped you to Private and held up your application for OCS. That was quite a blow to your ego."

I remembered the OCS thing. Swenson had lots of guts, was generally liked by the men, had some college and would have made a good officer. We both put in for OCS at the same time.

Swenson became angry. "I have a perfect right to go to OCS."

"Not now," Cannon said with a tight smile.

The roar of a plane interrupted our thoughts. The Zero was back with a fresh load of ammunition and a batch of Japan's finest was unloading down at the beach.

"Here we go again," muttered Lucca, taking aim at one poor unfortunate heading for our position. He pressed the trigger gently and the man dropped. Lucca looked at Cannon. "I just killed a guy, Lieutenant. Why don't we have an investigation?"

Cannon's answer was lost in a hail of bullets and the thunder of a Zero close overhead. Swenson lobbed a grenade beachward and got two more. For the next few minutes we were busy saving our skins.

Fifteen minutes later, the beach was clear and the Zeros were gone.

Lucca would never see his beloved New York City again. Three bullets had found him.

SWENSON RAN HIS FINGERS OVER THE DEAD MAN'S FACE. "Lieutenant, your list of suspects is getting smaller." Swenson looked skyward and muttered some words in Latin, then somewhat sheepishly looked at us. "I played the part of a Priest once in a movie, and I remembered the words for the last rites."

Valdez grabbed his arm. "Swenson, you do that for me if I get it?" —
Swenson nodded. "Sure."

Cannon laughed dryly. "A waste of time for both of you." Blood was staining his shirt. "I caught one in the shoulder, but I'll be okay. Let's continue."

Wendal looked at the wounded shoulder. "Better do something. That's your tennis arm." He pulled the shirt aside and sprinkled some sulfa drug on the hole.

Cannon glared at Wendal. "You don't really have a Ph.D. do you, Wendal?"

Wendal backed off. "What the hell are you talking about?"
"That's why you never applied for OCS," Cannon went on. "Your Ph.D. thesis was never accepted and you lied when you enlisted in the Marines. You knew if you went to OCS, they'd check up on you."

"That examining board!" Wendal said bitterly. "A bunch of old fashioned, out of date — how did you know about that?" His eyes and face were angry.

"Vinson kept a file on all of you. That little tidbit of information was in it," Cannon said. "He was blackmailing you, wasn't he? Vinson wrote a letter to M.I.T. and found out all about you." Cannon's eyes were gleaming as they bored into Wendal's face. "All those tests

Vinson passed to make Captain — those high grades — *you* took those tests, didn't you?"

Wendal took his position by the rock. "I helped him." Suddenly, anger overwhelmed him. "That wasn't enough! He wanted more — even money — on our lousy salary! Then, he said he was going to expose me anyhow."

This M.I.T. stuff was news to me. I sat there wide eyed, listening to the two guys from Boston have it out.

Valdez was wide eyed too. "Hey, Wendal, you shot the creep?"

"Maybe," said Cannon, transferring his gaze to Valdez. "Valdez — or maybe I should call you Lopez — a two bit hood from Los Angeles. You were living a lie too until Vinson found out about your police record."

Valdez looked scared. His mouth dropped open. "Sure — I'm Lopez, but I ain't no hood no more. I'm a Marine. Look. I been doing a good job." He motioned toward the beach. "I got four guys out there."

"He was blackmailing you?"

"Yeah. But what's there to blackmail? I ain't got nothing."

I felt sorry for Valdez — or Lopez. There was the suggestion of a tear in his eye. The Lopez thing was news to me also.

Swenson lighted a cigarette with one quick motion. "Out here, names and police records are meaningless."

A ZERO APPEARED AND ANOTHER RAIDING PARTY STARTED for the shore. Cannon didn't seem to notice them. His eyes were fixed on Swenson.

"I don't know about that, Swenson," he said. "That little drug bust of yours meant something to Vinson."

Drug bust? I looked in surprise at Swenson.

"Look," said Swenson, "I got loaded in Vegas one night and some guy dared me to bring some stuff to Hollywood. He told the cops and they picked me up. It was just a gag. Didn't even make the papers."

"It was going on your OCS application, wasn't it?" sneered Cannon. "And maybe into a few Hollywood papers. I can see it now — Movie Star Marine a drug merchant."

Swenson brought his rifle around and aimed it at Cannon for an instant. Then, with a curse, he returned it to its original position — aiming toward the beach. Several grenades exploded behind us. Swenson took aim at a figure crawling along the beach — then slumped.

The script had called for a bullet between the eyes and that's exactly what Swenson got.

"Swenson!" screamed Cannon. "You killed Vinson!"

We ignored him — too busy trying to stay alive. The Zeros came at us like angry hawks and the raiding party's shooting had improved. Our little ridge became a hell-hole of bullets and grenades. They were determined to wipe us out, but they didn't. I accounted for four of them and I saw Cannon shoot three with Martin's rifle and one more with his forty-five. Valdez, still hopped up about the Lopez bit, took care of five and Wendal took the opportunity to show off his marksmanship. The remaining raiders finally ran back to their boat.

We were about to relax when a Zero made one last bullet-scattering sweep. I could almost see the pilot leering at us. We ground ourselves into the sand. After the plane had disappeared, I realized that I had been hit in the shoulder and left leg. It was painful, but I was still alive.

The only one alive. Cannon lay back on the sand, his face a mass of blood, arm outstretched. Wendal, his body riddled with bullets, lay across a rock while Valdez — or Lopez, who cares? — was draped across his protective rock — gone to his reward without benefit of Swenson's priestly role.

A few minutes later, a bunch of Marines broke through the brush.

"Hey!" cried one. "You guys took care of them!"

"So we did," I said, and passed out.

A BIG JET FLYING OVERHEAD BROUGHT ME BACK TO 1981. The patch of sand was quiet again. Probably no one had stopped there since 1942 and outside of a few passing natives, the area was uninhabited.

Who *had* killed Vinson?

Cannon's investigation had uncovered a lot of damning evidence against the five. With the pressures of jungle warfare bearing down on them, any one of the five could have killed Vinson without a second thought. Officially, nothing ever came of the investigation because my notebook was completely destroyed during the last Zero sweep — and I decided to keep my mouth shut, telling the brass that we were too busy fighting to investigate a murder. From that day on, the war intensified and Vinson, his murder and the five suspects were quickly forgotten. Somehow, I made it through the rest of the war, coming out with a gimp leg.

Still, Vinson's death had occupied my thoughts from time to time through the years. Swenson? Valdez? Who? There was one missing link — Cannon's note book that he kept in that metal case. Neither box or notebook had ever been found.

An odd thought struck me. Perhaps Cannon tossed the notebook into the bushes before he died. I broke out in a cold sweat. Would a

paper notebook last 39 years in this climate? It might if it was in that metal box: I had always had the feeling that Cannon knew who the killer was — and the answer could be in his notebook.

I stood up and located the spot where I'd last seen Cannon's body stretched out on the sand and walked in the general direction of the outstretched right arm as I remembered it. I soon found myself in a tangle of jungle plant life, spiders and angry insects. With the aid of a pocket knife, I searched the whole area and was about to give up when I spotted a bit of rusty metal sticking out of the sand under a colorful plant. I grabbed the metal and pulled.

It was Cannon's notebook case!

With trembling fingers I quickly opened the case and pulled out the notebook. I looked around, half expecting to see Cannon's angry face and accusing eyes. Then, I sat back on a log and went through the notebook, slowly, page by page. Most of the notes covered data he had brought up during our ill fated investigation. However, there was a terse note on one page about the apparent suicide of his wife. On another page, there was a reference to me and a hassle I'd had with Vinson over his reluctance to take my OCS application seriously. Yeah — I remembered that. The SOB had laughed at me. You? Bullard, an officer? I can still see his leering, fat face.

On the last page, in neat, handwritten script, there was a short paragraph.

THE TRUTH ABOUT VINSON'S MURDER. I
SAW SWENSON FOLLOW VINSON OUT OF
THE OFFICER'S CLUB THAT SATURDAY
NIGHT. BOTH HAD BEEN DRINKING. WHEN
THEY REACHED THE JUNGLE SWENSON
TOOK A SHOT AT VINSON BUT MISSED.
SWENSON THEN PASSED OUT. I PICKED UP
SWENSON'S GUN AND SENT VINSON TO A
WELL DESERVED DEATH. YOU SEE, VINSON
DESTROYED MY MARRIAGE AND MY
LOVELY WIFE.

LT. MILO CANNON

I studied the notebook for a few more minutes, then crumpled up the pages and burned them one by one. After I had destroyed the confession, I tossed the metal case into the bushes.

Who cares who killed Vinson as long as *somebody* killed the SOB.
I went back to the tour boat.

Rex screamed, clutched himself and keeled backwards into an endtable. He fell in a tangled, writhing heap, making horrible gargling noises and clawing at his chest. "I'm shot," he gasped; "I'm shot!"

Saturday Night Special

by TERRY BLACK

IT WAS 9:30. THE APARTMENT WAS HOT, STUFFY. Rex lifted the window drape and glanced outside.

The streetlamp cast a filmy yellow circle on the cracked pavement of Mooney Street and a cluster of trash cans. The street was deserted. Rex dropped the curtain and groped for a Salem.

"Come on, you bastard," he whispered.

He snagged a Salem between two fingers, lit it with his Cricket lighter, took five quick puffs, and ground it into an ashtray. The ashtray was filled with crumpled, unsmoked Salems.

Rex licked his lips. He went to the refrigerator, pulled out a turkey salad sandwich, fingered it, eyed it, nibbled a corner like a nervous white rat, finally stuck it back in the fridge.

9:33.

Rex returned to the window and pulled aside the drape. Mooney Street was still deserted. For a moment he rested his forehead on the cold pane of glass. When he straightened, there was a dripping splotch of moisture where his skin had touched the pane.

He balled a fist and drove it into his open palm. He glanced at the door. He loosened his tie, rubbed his neck, blinked his eyes. He studied the ceiling for exactly ten seconds. He pulled back the drape and looked out over Mooney Street again.

It was still quiet, still empty. The trash cans stood like bored old men under the pale glow of the streetlamp. A tomcat poked at an old can with an orange-and-black paw.

Rex released the drape with trembling fingers. He groped for another Salem, but couldn't find the pack.

Someone knocked on the door.

Rex stood frozen like a Central Park statue, one hand thrust into a pocket of his pants, his head cocked slightly forward. His eyes went from side to side. He swallowed.

Someone knocked on the door again. And yelled, "Hey, Mac! Would you open up the Goddamn door already?"

Rex unchained and unlocked the door, opened it and jumped back as it swung wide. A swarthy man in a Naugahyde trenchcoat with beefy jowls and a cheap cigar slouched in. Something bulged under his arm-pit.

"About time," said the stranger. "I got better things to do than bang on doors. You got any booze?"

Rex backed away. "Are you the man who — who —"

"Yeah, I'm him. Look, let's make this fast, I got a heavy date at midnight. Who's the pigeon?"

"I'm not sure I —"

"You're sure. You're sure, or you wouldn't have called me." The stranger spotted Rex's liquor cabinet and went over for an inspection. "Let's talk money. Normally I go expensive: four, five hundred, minimum. But you got an honest face. For you —" He pulled a fifth of rum from the cabinet " — three hundred. A bargain. Take it or leave it."

"Gee, I don't know," said Rex.

The stranger put a fatherly hand on Rex's shoulder. "Hey, it's not so bad. You're doin' the world a favor, chum. Be a better place without the guy." The stranger puffed his cigar. "Me, I wish everyone did like you're doing. Someone steps outta line, you take care of him, that's all. Pretty soon everyone's behavin' himself, no one's makin' trouble, everybody's happy. The world'd be a better place, I'm telling you."

Rex sat down. "She was beautiful," he said softly. "I can't tell you how beautiful she was."

"Crime of passion, huh?" The stranger took a gulp of rum. "She dumped you, she threw you out. Said you weren't good enough for her. Now you want to get even." He wiped his mouth. "Serves her right, the bitch. Broads like that really burn me."

"Oh, she wasn't so bad," said Rex. "She apologized and everything. She didn't want to hurt my feelings. She said I could still come over at lunch for lemonade and Thomas's English Muffins. She even offered to set me up with one of her girlfriends."

The stranger grinned. "You oughtta take her up on it. At least get

some phone numbers, before I go over and blow her brains out."

"No, no," Rex insisted. "You've got it all wrong. I don't want you to kill her."

"Then who — ?"

"Me, that's who." Rex jerked a thumb at his chest. "I'm fed up with everything. Kill me, put me out of my misery."

"Oh, Christ." The stranger made a face. "Just what I need, a fruitcake. You want to end it all, pal? Do it yourself." He turned to leave.

"Wait, wait!" Rex dove after him, clutched his trenchcoat in both hands. "I can't do it myself. I've tried, dear God I've tried. I got a gun and tried to shoot myself, but I loaded it wrong and the dumb thing jammed. I tried to take an overdose of sleeping pills, but I got sick and spent all night running to the bathroom. I even tried to jump off the Empire State Building, but I couldn't climb the safety rail and besides, some clown in bermuda shorts kept trying to sell me scenic postcards."

"I just love hearing about your problems," said the stranger. "You want to let go of my coat now?"

"I'll pay you," said Rex, springing to his feet. He pulled out his checkbook and asked, "Who do I make this payable to . . . ?"

The stranger groaned. "I don't take checks."

"Oh." Rex thought a minute. "Well, let's see." He opened his wallet and started counting. "I can give you fifty-seven bucks now, and the rest when I get it — "

The stranger drew a sharp breath.

" — or I could give you fifty-seven and a check for the balance, or maybe — hey, I know!" Rex ducked into his bedroom and came back moments later with a gallon jug full of nickels, dimes and quarters. He smashed it wildly against the corner of a table and covered the floor with a carpet of change, like the pirate's treasure in an Errol Flynn movie.

"All yours," said Rex, scooping handfuls of change into the pockets of the stranger's trenchcoat. "There must be close to a hundred bucks here. And you also get fifty-seven in cash and a check for another two hundred. If you hurry, you can cash it before the bank finds out I'm dead. Not only that, but — "

"Okay," said the stranger.

"What?" Rex looked up, suddenly terrified. "WHAT?"

"Okay. It's a deal." The stranger's hand knifed into his armpit and pulled out a sleek .38, aimed dead center at Rex's chest. "You talked me into it."

"Wait a minute," Rex squealed, throwing his hands in front of him. "I don't think — "

"BANG!" yelled the stranger.

"AAAAAGGGGGHHHHH!" Rex screamed, clutching himself and keeling backwards into an endtable covered with soiled ashtrays, crumpled beercans and six back issues of *TV Guide*. He fell into the debris in a tangled, writhing heap, making horrible gargling noises and clawing at his chest. "I'm shot, I'm shot, I'm — "

He broke off, suddenly suspicious. "Wait a minute. You didn't shoot me. You just pointed your gun and said bang."

"Brilliant. The man's a genius." The stranger tucked his gun away. "Give me your wallet, punk." He snatched it from Rex's fingers and took out fifty. "This is a consultation fee. Next time you need help, go see a shrink." He walked out and slammed the door.

THE PHONE RANG. REX PICKED IT UP.

"Rex?" asked a soft voice. "This is Lisa. I've been worried about you. Why don't you come over to my place for some English muffins, or something? I don't want to get back together or anything, of course, but I thought maybe you'd — "

"BANG!" said Rex. He slammed down the phone and blew smoke from his forefinger. Somewhere a clock chimed ten.

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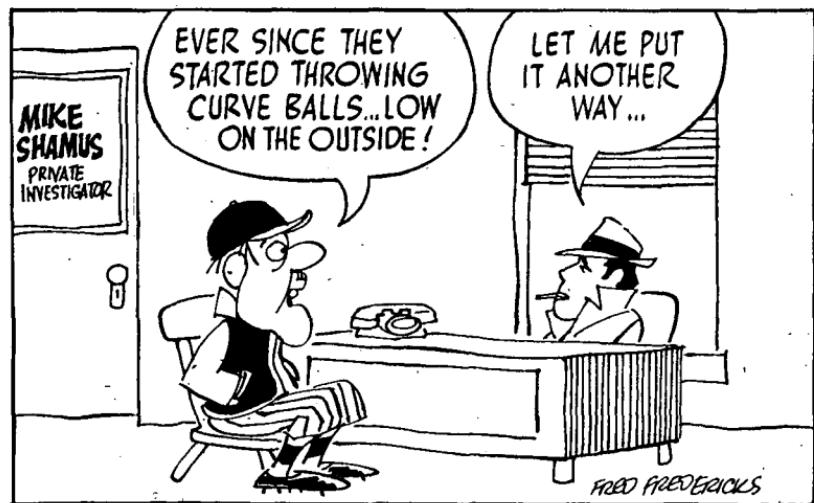
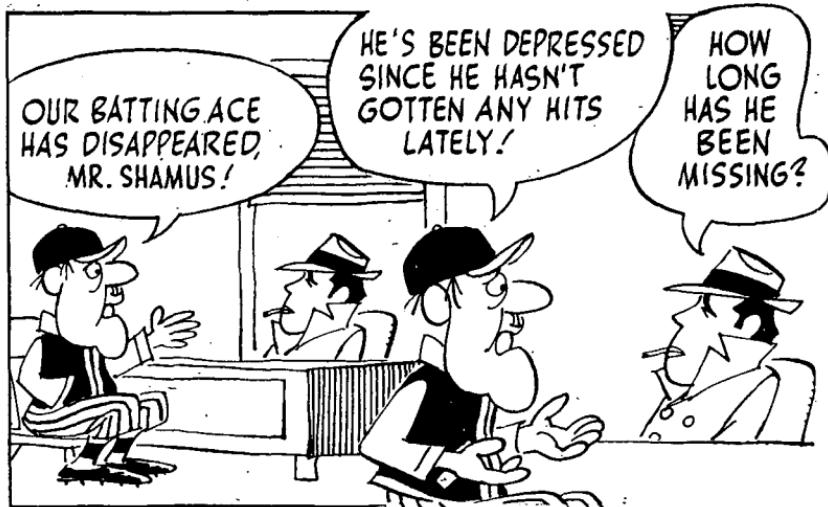
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Mike Shamus

by FRED FREDERICKS



MIKE'S MAIL Continued from page 75

CORRESPONDENCE

Just a brief note to inform you that Ed Hoch has selected *Correspondence With A Bicycle Thief* (MSMM Sept. '80) as one of the stories to be included in E.P. Dutton's **BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR — 1981.**

It's nice to see more and more MSMM fiction appearing in this annual volume, a clear indication the quality of MSMM is ever improving.

Jerry Jacobson
814 Northwest 70th Street
Seattle, WA 98117

CORRECTIONS

Some weeks ago you sent back a story of mine, a Nero Wolfe pastiche. You were kind enough to add a personal note. I thought I'd drop you a note to say thank you for that and the job you are doing on MSMM.

I especially enjoyed the "Crimes in Other Times" issue. Perhaps *Death of a Pulpster* was the one I most enjoyed. In connection with that story I'd like to suggest that Taylor is off in one or two minor matters. For example, shouldn't the cigarette be a Lucky, not a Luckie? Further, if Prohibition ended in 1933, why is gin illegal in 1935? Finally, wasn't Fred MacIssac really Fred MacIsaac? The latter was my mother's maiden name, so I'm especially conscious in that regard. These, if I'm right, were only minor errors in an enjoyable story. I'm sure Taylor could work out a series using the same characters.

Carl Larsen
3872 Amboy Road
Staten Island, NY 10308

You're right about the Lucky. Also, gin would not be illegal in 1935. And the spelling of MacIsaac is indeed MacIsaac. Fortunately, none of these affected the story, but it's good to set the record straight. Actually, I suspect author Mike Taylor was just testing to see if you were paying attention.

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

The late Phoebe Atwood Taylor never produced a monumental book in the mystery field, but she did create two detectives who had a wide following: Cape Cod hayseed philosopher Asey Mayo and, under her Alice Tilton pseudonym, Leonidas Witherall whose fate in life it was to be a double for William Shakespeare.

A few months ago The Foul Play Press printed three of her books in new quality paperback editions. They quickly attracted considerable notice because the murder victims depicted on the covers were well known personalities in the crime/suspense field, a unique and fascinating idea.

Now we have three more of Mrs. Taylor's books and once again three distinguished corpses are on the covers. On *The Six Iron Spiders* the deceased is Otto Penzler, owner of the Mysterious Press and co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*. On *Proof of the Pudding* you will find Michele Slung, the young and comely authority on women in crime fiction whose *Crime on Her Mind* is a well-known anthology. And, horribly murdered by pickaxe on the cover of *Cold Steal* is none other than the very famous Joan Kahn, the only mystery editor to our knowledge to have her name used as a trademark of excellence. All three volumes are very nicely gotten up in soft covers at \$4.95 each. For the same price the Foul Play Press also offers new soft cover reprints of two of Stanley Ellin's well-known books, *Dreadful Summit* and *The Eighth Circle*. To mention Mr. Ellin's major talent at this late date is hardly necessary.



James McClure's excellent novels of South Africa feature Lt. Tromp Kramer and his Bantu assistant, Detective Mickey Zondi. In the midst of the bitter racial policies that currently prevail in that part of the world, this salt and pepper team provides some exciting and authentic police action. The Africa depicted here is far from the equally valid one used in the fine novels by John Wyllie, but it comes alive on every page that McClure writes. His graphic descriptions are not for the faint hearted, but the plotting is deft and the people who move through the story are alive and human. McClure is consistently good and he maintains his high standard in this latest work *The Blood of an Englishman*. A Joan Kahn book from Harper and Row. \$10.95.

☆ ☆ ☆

Simon Brett has now given us several good and readable books about middle-aged actor cum detective Charles Paris. The latest is *The Dead Side of the Mike* and is all about the B.B.C. as seen from the inside. There are two very satisfactory murders, a good booby trap, and much intricate talk about the workings of British broadcasting where actor Paris has been engaged for some minor roles. Naturally his investigation is successful in the midst of a bittersweet romance that never quite gets started, more's the pity. It's a good and engaging tale, but in this instance it will have a great deal more meaning for English readers since the quirks of the B.B.C. are relatively unknown in this country. (Scribner's \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Grand Master Aaron Marc Stein, who writes under his own name as well as George Bagby and Hampton Stone, has more than a hundred mystery novels to his credit. The latest, a Bagby and about Inspector Schmidt of course, is *A Question of Quarry*. While leaving a dinner party Bagby is shoved into a car, badly beaten, and then dumped out in Central Park. It soon develops that someone picked up the wrong man, but who was really wanted and why? As usual the author is most entertaining, but this time the exciting finish takes place off stage and the vital clue is not revealed until the last page, both of which leave the reader a little nonplussed. Inspector Schmidt is as thoroughly competent as ever, which is all that many of his fans will ask. (Double-day Crime Club, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

There is a tendency lately in the longer crime story to bring in every possible complication, stir well, spice liberally with plenty of sex, and end up something like *La Forza del Destino* wherein, at the end of the opera, there is no one left alive to sing. We have two new books this month that fit this category.

The first is *Cage of Mirrors* by Robert Ray. This one starts out as a private eye caper, but it soon gets involved in international high finance, diamond dealing, manipulations by the ultra rich, and secret organizations that wield inhuman power behind the scenes. There are also a number of very sexy women who, quite astonishingly, seem to all look very much alike, vertically or otherwise. This appears to be a first novel. It moves along well, but if you think that the author left anything out, wait and turn the page. (Lippincott and Crowell, \$11.95)

The Flight of the Dragon by Lee R. Bobker brings this much honored screen writer into print with his second novel. This one is primarily an espionage caper: the number two man in communist China decides to defect to the West and tell what he knows. When he flees to Hong Kong on his journey to freedom, he comes to the attention of the agents of many powers. As they compete with each other the carnage mounts and some connections with China's past history come to light. There is also, of course, a beautiful Asian girl involved and once again the result is a running account which is something like fruit cake in that nothing is left out. Toward the finish the death rate again increases alarmingly, but by now the reader is at least prepared. Whatever else, this one is a page turner and will keep the reader's attention, which is a large part of the game. (Morrow, \$10.95)



As many mystery fans already know, the fine *Mystery* series is back on public television with the same high production values and superior script writing. Penguin has done the viewer a real favor by offering new paperback editions of the works which have been filmed for the series. The latest two to come to hand are *Mad Hatter's Holiday*, a Sergeant Cribb Mystery by Peter Lovesey that is laid in Victorian England, and the same author's *Abracadaver*. This latter work has a practical joker doing his stuff in the music halls of England until a magician's young lady assistant is foully done in. Then Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackeray are called upon to meet a very stiff challenge indeed. Both books, in the Penguin paperback edition, are priced at \$2.95.

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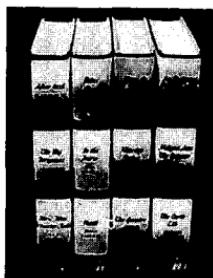
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